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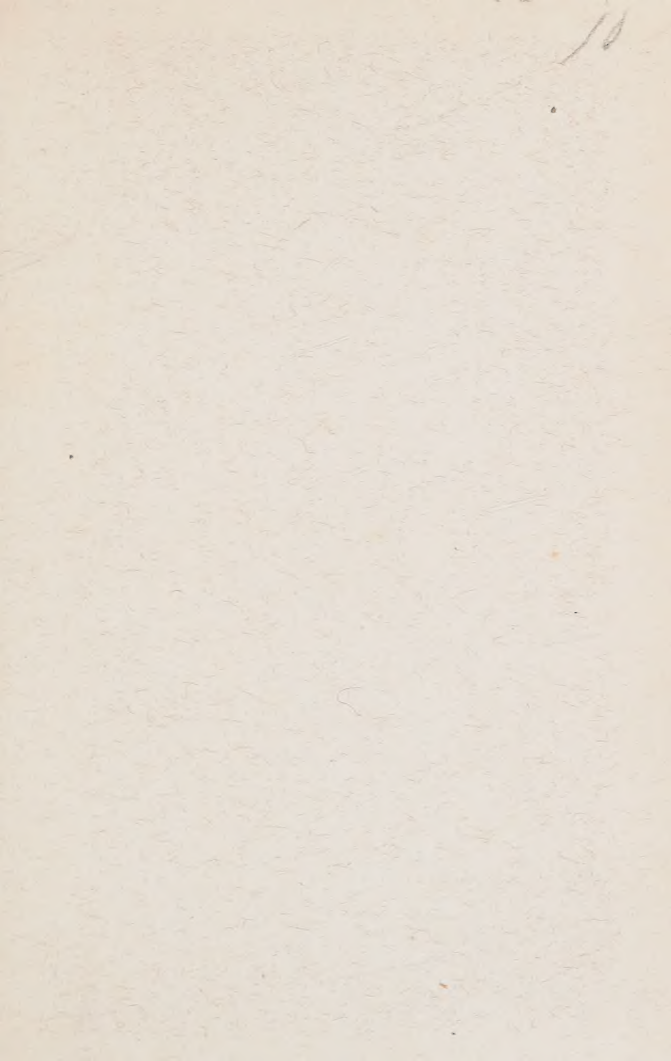
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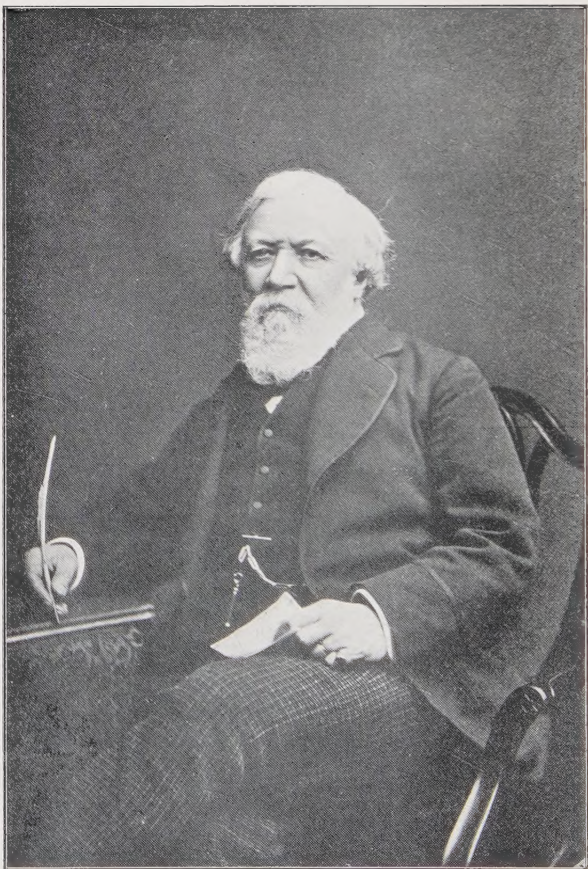
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ROBERT BROWNING.

From a photograph by Elliott and Fry.

Bell's Miniature Series of Great Writers

BROWNING

BY

SIR FRANK T. MARZIALS, C.B.



LONDON

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This is the portrait published in Horne's "New Spirit of the Age."

BROWNING

HIS LIFE

ROBERT BROWNING is, as I hold, a very great poet; but it can scarcely be denied that he is a poet whose works present serious difficulties. In such a case—where genuine power co-exists with obscurity, or ruggedness, or some other defect, or seeming defect, of surface—each reader must, in the last resort, determine for himself whether it be worth his while to dig below the outer crust—whether, after a first trial or so, he comes across such gems as adequately reward his toil. Now, I am no fanatic. I have no wish to make proselytes by fire of rhetoric and sword of argument. All men will never like, or love, precisely the same things: heaven forbid that they should! There is not a poet, scarcely Shakespeare himself, whose appeal is quite universal. To many Browning will always be caviare. But where he touches he touches deeply. To those who in heart and intellect respond to his verse, he affords a fund of noble pleasure: visions of beauty in nature and man; studies of character marked by rare penetration; marvellous reproductions of what may be called historical atmosphere; scenes

of action swift and decisive; flashing impressionist pictures of the outward seeming of things; problems of life and destiny discussed often with excessive subtlety perhaps, but also with originality and insight; while over all there reigns, in contrast to what may occasionally seem esoteric in the verse itself, a fine healthy manly spirit, that holds right to be right, and wrong wrong, and the world a place ordered by divine law, and not of caprice. And now, with this brief foreword, let us turn to the story of his life.

Robert Browning's career was that of a poet and a poet only. He never belonged to any of the recognized professions; he never, at any point, became a man of action. Apart from one romantic passage, the story of his life is uneventful, and not more rich in incident than the life-story of the ordinary citizen. It was at Camberwell that he came into the world, on the 7th of May, 1812, being born of middle class parentage, and among middle class surroundings. Both father and grandfather occupied posts—in the case of the grandfather a post of importance—in the Bank of England. The grandfather seems to have belonged to the cross-grained overbearing type of parent and official; the father, to have been pre-eminently lovable—not very fervent in business as a bank clerk perhaps, but hating wrong, sweet of temper, devoted to books. The mother, half-Scot and half-German, appears to have possessed no marked intellectual power, but had the sweet life-pervading Evangelical

piety of ninety years ago. According to Carlyle she was the "true type of a Scottish gentlewoman"; and she lived as a "divine woman" in her son's memory. Of means, at the outset at least—the parents had only been married the year before Robert's birth—there were seemingly sufficient to meet requirements according to a simple standard, but no more. Altogether, nothing in all this strikes one as exceptional—for, thank God, the mother whose children hold her to be "divine" is no rarity. "The wind bloweth where it listeth," says the Master. Here again the spark of genius justifies itself as breaking one knows not whence.

But if there is nothing in the home at Camberwell to account for the spark, neither did anything occur there to extinguish it or hinder a fuller effulgence. The child's boyhood was much that of any other bright promising lad. He went to a little school kept by a "lady of reduced fortunes"; then to a preparatory school, going home from Saturday to Monday; and then to a school kept by a Rev. T. Ready; and *then*, somewhat apparently before reaching the age of fifteen, he appears to have outgrown Mr. Ready's instructions, and his school career came to an end. Thenceforth he mainly educated himself. He read for some time with a tutor; attended lectures at University College; studied French, and also, evidently, Latin and Greek; made himself master of an immense English vocabulary; acquired a knowledge of music both theoretical and practical; read indefatigably, as indeed he had done

ever since he could read at all, thus laying the foundations of a knowledge that grew to be encyclopaedic. Nor were the physical arts neglected, dancing, boxing, fencing, riding. And all the time he was producing a considerable body of verse, including a MS. volume "Incondita," all ruthlessly and wisely destroyed.

An unusual education, of course. The "curriculum," or perhaps rather its absence, is scarcely to be recommended for the average British youth. Nor would it probably serve as the best training for any career beset by examinations. But for a poet? Why, for a poet, I confess I think a course of education which consisted mainly in leaving the pupil alone, was not without its advantages. At any rate the wings of his originality would thus escape all danger of being clipped. Mrs. Orr, indeed, seems to hold that if Browning had been subjected to severer scholastic discipline, he might have been less obscure. Possibly. Who can tell? There was a schoolmaster, it will be remembered, to whom Charles Lamb complained that the "Essays," his "little sketches," were "anything but methodical," and that he "was unable to make them otherwise," when the worthy pedagogue "offered to instruct" the essayist "in the method by which young gentlemen in *his* seminary were taught to compose English themes." One smiles. I doubt if any influence of schoolmaster, tutor, or university, would have much modified Browning's verse.

Of all these years of youth and early manhood, up to 1833, when, at the age of twenty



[Rischgitz Collection.]

EARLY PORTRAIT OF BROWNING.

From an engraving by J. C. Armytage.

he published his first poem, "Pauline," there is little that is definite to record. And as regards the history of his mental development, we are left pretty much to conjecture. We know that he admired Byron. We know too that he worshipped Shelley, and with an ardour that only faded in later years, when he saw reason to doubt the excellence of Shelley's moral character. As to his first acquaintance with Shelley's works, indeed, there hangs a tale. "Passing a bookstall one day"—it is Mr. Sharp who tells the story—"Browning saw in a box of second-hand volumes a little book advertised as 'Mr. Shelley's atheistical poem, very scarce.'" He was much struck; found, on inquiry, that Shelley was a reality, not a *nom de plume*, and was dead. "He begged his mother to procure him Shelley's works, a request not easily complied with for the excellent reason that not one of the local booksellers had ever heard of the poet's name. Ultimately, however, Mrs. Browning learnt that what she sought was procurable at the Olliers, in Vere Street." She went to the Olliers, bought the works, and with them was persuaded to buy the works of a poet even less known, John Keats. Little can she have guessed, good easy woman, what inflammatory stuff she was introducing into that orthodox, Evangelical, somewhat dissenting home. The boy read, and entered the seventh heaven. How far he may have imitated Shelley's manner in the fledgeling verse produced at this time we shall never know. The verse has perished. But it

seems difficult to believe that he was uninfluenced by Shelley's spirit. "Queen Mab," "The Revolt of Islam," "Alastor," "Prometheus Unbound"—here were winged seeds to fall into virgin soil of that richness! As I have said, we do not possess the materials for reconstituting the history of the poet's mind in its years of growth. But this at least is significant, that his first three works, however dramatic and impersonal in form, are elaborate studies of soul development; and we can scarcely go far wrong in concluding that much of his own inner life found expression in the confessions of Pauline's lover, in the story of the immense intellectual ambitions of Paracelsus, and in the record of Sordello's aspirations and alternate leanings to a life of thought or action. In other words, the Browning of these years was "mewing a mighty youth," conscious of great powers, not fully certain of their ultimate application; his mind and soul seething, unrestful, full of the future. Nor need we wonder if, like Andersen's Ugly Duckling, he now and again caused some little discomfort in the family nest.

One thing, however, seems to have been soon settled. When the time came for the choice of a profession, Browning decided that he would be a poet pure and simple. This was, in effect, to take a vow of poverty. The young man must have been perfectly aware that verse produced in whole-hearted devotion to art alone, and with never even a sideglance at popularity, was not likely to prove very marketable. Byron, no doubt,

had sold *his* wares with profit; but how about Keats, Shelley, Coleridge, or even Wordsworth? So, as Faraday, in analogous circumstances, turned from wealth to follow science, even thus did Browning, with poetry for his mistress, adopt, of set purpose, a mode of life which would almost certainly be unblest by affluence, and leave him, for an indefinite number of years, dependent on his father. And the father accepted the situation. He did so freely, gladly, with a generosity for which all who have profited by the son's art should do him honour. There was but one other child, a daughter, Sarianna, some two years younger than Robert; and the cost of the poet, and of his earlier poetry, seems never to have been regarded as an undue burden by the kind father. Nor is there any sign that the young man himself ever regretted the fleshpots of a more lucrative profession, except for a brief period when he much wanted to be married; and *then* his future wife refused to accept the sacrifice of his full poetic independence.

Of the publication of "Pauline" in 1833, when Browning was twenty years of age, as also of "Paracelsus," I speak elsewhere in dealing with his works. Suffice it to say here that the issue of those volumes, and more especially of "Paracelsus," in 1835, had a marked influence on his position and reputation as a poet. Henceforward he might remain, as he did for many a long year, unknown, or all but unknown, by the general public. But to those who saw deeper, he had justified himself as a genius. And socially the

publication of "Paracelsus" had results. He soon became free of the best literary society of the day,—knew, more or less intimately, Carlyle, Talfourd, Horne, Leigh Hunt, Barry Cornwall, Morekton Milnes, Forster, Eliot Warburton, Harriet Martineau, Landor, Dickens, Wordsworth.

On the 27th November, 1835, he first met Macready, the manager and actor, and on the 26th of the following May, after a supper given on the occasion of the first performance of Talfourd's "Ion"—a supper at which Landor and Wordsworth were present—Macready and Browning discussed the production of a play on the subject of "Strafford." It was a subject that Browning knew well. He had lately been helping Forster to write a life of Strafford for Lardner's "Cabinet Cyclopædia"; and he shortly afterwards set to work upon the play, which was written, put in hand, rehearsed with the usual little hitches, and finally produced at Covent Garden Theatre on the 1st of the following May (1837). Macready himself naturally assumed the title-part. The one important woman's part, that of Lady Carlisle, was taken by Helen Faucit, an admirable actress, according to tradition, and a very accomplished woman. But Macready and Miss Faucit were inadequately supported. The piece lived through the first night, seems to have grown in apparent vitality on the second, and on the fifth yielded to untoward fate—the withdrawal of one of the chief actors, and general pecuniary embarrassment. Whether, under any

circumstances, it ever would, or ever will, prove a dramatic success, may be doubted. It is indistinct in exposition and motive, and assumes too much historical knowledge on the part of the audience; while, probably from an attempt to write down to a lower and more popular level, even the pure poetic power of the author is, for the nonce, tarnished and dim.

Only once again did Browning make a serious attempt to place the creatures of his imagination in the glare of the footlights. At the close of 1842, Macready, though in dire money straits, was projecting the revival of the poetic drama. He either commissioned, or accepted—probably something between the two—a play of Browning's, the "Blot in the 'Scutcheon." Dickens, to whom Forster had shown the MS., and who had written the prologue for Marston's "Patrician's Daughter," which was to be Macready's first venture, spoke of the work with enthusiasm. He wrote, on the 25th November:

Browning's play has thrown me into a perfect passion of sorrow. To say that there is anything in its subject save what is lovely, true, deeply affecting, full of the best emotion, the most earnest feeling, and the most true and tender source of interest, is to say that there is no light in the sun, and no heat in blood. It is full of genius, natural and great thoughts, profound and yet simple, and beautiful in its vigour. I know nothing that is so affecting, nothing in any book I have ever read, as Mildred's recurrence to that "I was so young, I had no mother." I know no love like it, no passion like it, no moulding of a splendid thing after its conception, like it. And I swear it is

a tragedy that MUST be played ; and must be played by Macready. . . . And if you tell Browning that I have seen it, tell him that I believe from my soul there is no man living (and not many dead) who could produce such a work.

This was unstinted eulogy. Dickens was at the time the most popular writer in England—Browning, of any English writer of real power, probably the least known. It seems difficult to understand, as Browning himself evidently thought, why Forster never at the time told him in what terms Dickens had spoken of his work, or gave him the benefit of such a testimonial with the public. To Macready the letter, however, *was* shown. Nevertheless Macready shilly-shallied. He commissioned the prompter, “a grotesque person with a red nose and a wooden leg,” as Browning complains, to read the play to the actors—with derisive laughter for result. He said he would not take the chief part himself, but confided it to Phelps, then rather an aspirant than an actor of authority. He played fast and loose with Phelps, taking advantage of the latter’s temporary indisposition to attempt resumption of the part. He proposed changes of title and situation, and lines of his own manufacture. That he should not spend money on scenery and dresses was a foregone conclusion: he had no money to spend. Finally, however, the play was produced, and, notwithstanding every disadvantage, applauded, and so far successful, that it held the boards for the few days which elapsed between the first night and the

closing of the bankrupt theatre. With Macready Browning was very angry indeed.¹

But in order to follow the story of Browning's connection with the stage, I have been compelled somewhat to anticipate. "Strafford" had been produced in May, 1837, and "The Blot in the 'Scutcheon" in February, 1843; and between those dates, some events worthy of record had taken place in his life, and he had written and published works of importance. Thus, in 1838, he paid his first memorable visit to Italy,—Italy, which was to become, in after days, his home, the land of his predilection, the inspirer of so much of his art, and, finally, far in the future, the place of his death. "Italy, my Italy," he calls her, crying:

Open my heart and you will see
Graved inside of it, Italy;
Such lovers old am I and she.

This first tour extended from Trieste, whither he had gone direct by sea, through certain portions of North Italy—including a visit to "delicious Asolo," as he even then calls the town which his verse was to make memorable,—and then through the Tyrol and Germany, down the Rhine into

¹ It is but fair, however, to Macready to say that we have not his account of these transactions; and it illustrates the difficulty of getting at facts that Browning says distinctly, "not a shilling was spent on scenery or dresses," while Lady Martin (Miss Faucit) tells us that "the play was mounted in all matters with great care," and speaks of "infinite pains bestowed." See "Tennyson, Ruskin, and Browning," by Mrs. Ritchie.

Belgium, and so home. Those were picturesque days of travel, as Ruskin has reminded us. Europe's buildings had not yet suffered at the hand of the restorer; towns remained unmodernized; local life was quainter, less uniform; the inns more individual and homely, if not so palatial. Browning may be taken to have enjoyed himself thoroughly. Among the immediate poetic fruits of the tour, produced during the course of it, are the "Home Thoughts from the Sea," composed off Cape St. Vincent, and "How they brought the Good News from Ghent," composed, it has been suggested, as a kind of rueful antidote to sea-sickness. And besides material for immediate verse, he was gathering impressions of life and landscape invaluable for his future work—note upon note of national characteristics, mental sketch on sketch, in vivid colour, of the glories of earth and sky. All the wonderful impressionist scenery of "Sordello," begun some months before, and of "Pippa Passes," was reflected into his mind during that Italian tour.

And "Sordello" was his next book. It is essentially a hard book. "All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it," says the Ecclesiast, and the words might well serve as a text for a book so everyway toilsome. Scarcely any one at that date could make head or tail of it. Even Browning's previous admirers seem to have been depressed. In order to show, in concrete form, the effect produced on the reader of 1840, I can scarcely do better than quote again a little story, so often told,—I tell it as it was told to me,—in

which Douglas Jerrold figures. Douglas Jerrold then was over-worked and ill, and had been ordered to the seaside under strict injunctions to abstain from all mental work. One morning his wife went out, bent on shopping, or what not. During her absence, a parcel of books came in, sent, through some mistake, for notice or review. She had left her husband quite patient and quiet. She found him, on her return, distraught, dishevelled, pacing about the room like a bedlamite. "There," he cried, pointing to a small open volume on the table, "look at that!" It was no time for remonstrance or objection. Mrs. Jerrold could but comply. She took up the book, read it for a few moments, and then said, "Why, my dear, it's gibberish." "Thank God," cried Douglas Jerrold, who had attributed the bewilderment of the book to some bewilderment in his own brains, "Thank God, then my mind is not gone!"

So "Sordello" had no sale; and Browning remained for long years the poet of the few, not of the many, a singer singing practically without audience or remuneration. Yet he bated neither heart nor hope. As he wrote afterwards, in manly words, he blamed neither the public, nor himself, for what there had been of failure in this particular venture; and still less did he cease from writing or abandon his belief in his own mission. To *that*, through some thirty years of comparative neglect, he held unswervingly, at once without arrogance, self-assertion, or self-advertisement, and, which is perhaps even more

rare and admirable, without bitterness. Still, not only to live, but also to publish at a father's expense, can scarcely be altogether satisfactory to either party. Robert would naturally seek to minimize the cost of placing his works before the neglectful reader. Discussing the matter with Moxon, the poet-publisher of those days, "the latter remarked"—I am quoting from Mr. Gosse's graceful "Robert Browning, Personalities"—"that

... he was bringing out some editions of the old Elizabethan dramatists in a comparatively cheap form, and that if Mr. Browning would consent to print his poems as pamphlets, using this cheap type, the expense would be very inconsiderable. The poet jumped at the idea, and it was agreed that each poem should form a separate brochure of just one sheet—sixteen pages in double columns—the entire cost of which should not exceed twelve or fifteen pounds. In this fashion began the celebrated series of "Bells and Pomegranates," eight numbers of which, a perfect treasury of fine poetry, came out successively between 1841 and 1846; "Pippa Passes" led the way, and was priced first at sixpence; then, the sale being inconsiderable, at a shilling, which greatly encouraged the sale; and so, slowly, up to half-a-crown, at which the price of each number finally rested.

Yes, "a perfect treasury of fine poetry," as Mr. Gosse truly says. These eight pamphlet parts—which within my own recollection could be found in the sixpenny-odd-number trays of second-hand booksellers—contain such works as "Pippa Passes," "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon," "In a Gondola," "Artemis Prologuizes," "The

Pied Piper of Hamelin," "How they brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix," "The Italian in England," "The Englishman in Italy," "The Bishop orders his Tomb in St. Praxed's Church," "The Flight of the Duchess," and the first part of "Saul." How did poetry of this force and beauty, of this strong and fine individuality, fail to obtain general recognition? The giants who were alive at the time of Browning's birth—Shelley, Keats, Byron, Coleridge—had all passed away. Of that great brotherhood all were gone, except Wordsworth, and Wordsworth was now well stricken in years,—a splendid old tree, but past fruit-bearing. Of living and writing poets, only Tennyson, and perhaps at her highest Miss Barrett, were capable of producing work of like rank. When one has explained with all one's faculty of explanation, it still remains somewhat of a wonder that Browning reached the great public so tardily.

Meanwhile he was still living with his parents at Hatcham, in Surrey, to which place the family had moved from Camberwell in 1835 or thereabouts; and, apart from the production of the "Blot in the 'Scutcheon," as already mentioned, the days passed uneventfully. He mixed freely in literary and general society, rode, danced, gave himself, in all reasonable limits, to the pleasures affected by the healthy young Englishman, and was, soothly be it said, like Disraeli and Bulwer and Dickens—though less exquisitely than the two first, and less *flamboyantly* than Dickens—somewhat of a dandy. Of personal eccentricity, real or acquired,

there is small trace; of "decadence" in conduct or morals, none. And so we reach the end of the year 1844, when, after another journey to Italy—Sicily and Rome this time—Love suddenly flashed into his life, masterful, irresistible. I know no more beautiful love-story.

During that year 1844, while Browning was absent from England, a book had appeared entitled "Poems by Elizabeth Barrett Barrett," which contained a reference to himself. In the piece entitled "Lady Geraldine's Courtship," the hero, a rather poor creature, if the truth must be told, relates how he would, while they sometimes "sate down in the gowans," read to the Lady Geraldine,

At times a modern volume, Wordsworth's solemn-
thoughted idyl,
Howitt's ballad-verse, or Tennyson's enchanted reverie,
Or from Browning some pomegranate, which, if cut deep
down the middle,
Shows a heart within blood-tinctured of a veined humanity.

Browning greatly admired Miss Barrett's poetry, and was naturally pleased. He and she had a common friend in John Kenyon, a man of means, culture, and to some extent of letters, who was cousin to Elizabeth Barrett, and had been at school with Browning's father. Kenyon suggested that Browning should write to Miss Barrett; and on the 10th January, 1845, the correspondence opened. Very fortunately, as I think, we possess it in its entirety, and can follow the courtship of this remarkable man and woman from earliest inception to marriage, obtaining by

the way much illuminative light on their character and aims. At first their letters are simply the letters of two persons similarly engaged, sympathetic, with many tastes and studies in common, and admiring each other's work. The writers express that admiration. They exchange literary confidences.

I write (says he) from a thorough conviction that it is the duty of me, and with the belief that after every drawback and shortcoming, I do my best, all things considered ... and so ... the not being listened to by one human creature would, I hope, in nowise affect me.

They discuss men and things in language which, if not perfect as epistolary style—it lacks, especially on his side, the bright simplicity of the master letter-writers—is individual and often interesting. But soon, very soon, the note of personal feeling becomes dominant. By the 16th of May he has pressed his desire to meet her face to face, and she has consented, recluse as she is—though she warns him, sadly and humbly, that he can derive no “least straw of pleasure” from the interview. “There is nothing to see in me, nor to hear in me,” she says. Her poetry is the “flower” of her; it has all her “colours,” “the rest . . . is nothing but a root, fit for the ground and the dark.”

“Fit for the ground and the dark,” thereby hangs a sorrowful tale. At the date of this correspondence, Elizabeth Barrett was about thirty-six years of age. From girlhood she had been delicate, and some seven years before this there

had been serious lung trouble, and she had been sent for recovery to Torquay. A younger brother, greatly beloved, had joined her there. He and two friends went out for a sail in July (1840), when the boat was upset, and all three were drowned. There were days of horrible suspense, many days before the recovery of the body. She was heart-broken, inconsolable—accused herself of being the cause of her brother's death, because it was at her urgent solicitation that he had remained as her companion at Torquay—broke down altogether, and was at death's door. The house stood close to the sea, and, as she told Miss Mitford, "during the whole winter the sound of the waves rang in her ears like the moans of one dying." Why she should have been left to listen to that dread music is unexplained. The next year she was removed to London by very slow stages, with her chest weak, nerves altogether shattered, power of motion greatly impaired, and relegated to a couch, and what seemed like life-long seclusion in a room darkened and almost hermetically sealed—a room where flowers pined and withered for want of air and light, and where it seems difficult to conceive that any human being should live, let alone study assiduously, and produce fine imaginative work.

To this dim chamber Robert Browning was admitted on "Tuesday, May 20th, 1845, 3—4½ p.m.," as he notes with a touching particularity. What did he find there? Scarcely beauty in the ordinary sense, I feel bound to think. I have seen no portrait of Miss Barrett or Mrs. Brown-

ing that suggests beauty. Miss Mitford, indeed, speaks of "a slight delicate figure, with a shower of dark curls falling on either side of a most expressive face, large tender eyes richly fringed by dark eyelashes, and a smile like a sunbeam." But all this is coupled with "such a look of youthfulness," and must refer to a Miss Barrett whose outlook on life had not yet been clouded by sorrow and illness. It was to no bright lovely girl that Browning was introduced on that 20th May, 1845, between the hours of three and half-past four.

But the woman's soul shone out, perhaps, the more purely and brilliantly, from a setting so dim and sad; and it was with her soul, the very essence of her, that Browning fell in love. He was already more than half in love on the strength of her poems and letters, and further intercourse and correspondence soon made him wholly hers. By the 31st August he proposes marriage. She refuses, naturally. Why should he, still a young man, in the pride of manhood, with the world before him, take for wife a broken invalid? He utterly dissents, presses his suit passionately, finally compels her to understand that his life's happiness is bound up in her,—that even if her bodily infirmities be permanent, as seems but too possible, she is to him the one woman in the world. If we were married, he argues, you would be mine in sickness as in health. Why, loving one another as we do, should we not contemplate union on the same terms?

But even when she has been brought to accept

this proposition—a proposition that could only be true, of course, in a case altogether exceptional—there were other difficulties. Browning, though confident he could make money, and prepared to live on very little, was not actually earning any tangible income. Miss Barrett had some money of her own—and on that they ultimately settled to live cheaply in Italy—but it was not much. The main obstacle, however, was Miss Barrett's impossible father. This grimly farcical old gentleman had seemingly convinced himself, by much perversion of the Scriptures, that his children were his slaves, and subject to his every whim. Any suggestion of marriage on their part he regarded as a deadly personal insult. Miss Barrett was simply afraid, physically afraid, to tell him of Robert Browning's proposal. She declared, and probably with truth, that the consequent scene of violence would altogether break her down. Thus Robert, an honourable gentleman, and neither ashamed of himself, nor with any reason to be so, was forced into a course of secrecy that must have been particularly galling. At last the father fulfilled the measure of his perversities by refusing to sanction a proposal, medically recommended, that she should try change of climate and scene—change, as one may say, from the atmosphere of that intolerable sick chamber—and go to Italy for the restoration of her health. She, for all her love and sense of filial duty, felt it was time to make her life her own. On the morning of the 12th of September, 1846, accompanied only by an old servant, and pur-



50, WIMPOLE STREET.

ELIZABETH BARRETT'S HOME FROM 1836 UNTIL HER
MARRIAGE.

posely not taking even her sisters into confidence, so that they might not fall under the paternal lash, she went to Marylebone Church, and the two were made one. After the ceremony, she went back to her home, No. 50, Wimpole Street, and remained there, as if nothing had happened, for a week. On the afternoon of the 19th, she left the house, in the same clandestine manner, and they started from Nine Elms Station for Paris.

And the father?—Why the father never forgot or forgave. He refused to listen to Browning's manly explanation. He left his daughter's letters for ever unopened. He remained unmoved by the success of the step she had taken, and her recovery to health. When her son was born, and she appealed to him with the pathos of her motherhood—she, a mother, to him, a father—he turned a deaf ear. And as he had lived, having treated another daughter in much the same way, so he died obstinate and unrelenting. Truly it may be a misfortune to have an illustrious daughter and son-in-law. Mr. Barrett will, I fear, live in literary history as a man whose qualities of head and heart were not admirable.

Does the love-story, begun with such fervour and passion, remain beautiful to the end? Judging beforehand one might have feared that with two beings so highstrung, so fervid in thought and feeling, the first glow and glory of love would be destined to fade, perhaps even more rapidly than is sadly usual, into "the light of common day." What happened was quite different. The tale of

their joint lives, up to the date of Mrs. Browning's death in 1861, is told in her correspondence. It is a tale of intense devotion on either side: on his of gentlest tenderest care for the woman who was so frail; on hers of grateful love answering the love that had transfigured her life. It is a tale, also, on either side, of high respect for the other's intellect and personality. They worked separately, without consultation, each not so much jealous of his own originality as anxious that the originality of the other should have its unchecked efflorescence. It was no part of their love-creed that they should see alike in all things. Browning, though he shared his wife's zeal in the cause of a united Italy, did not follow her through all the enthusiasms and hates of her somewhat feminine politics. He refused also to attribute to spiritualism that importance which she considered it deserved. Even in the days of their courtship there had been divergences—those quarrels, as one may say, which, according to the old saw, give to love a new zest. Thus they differed on the subject of duels,—which he advocated. Thus, again, she had lost "Flush, my dog," and heartbroken at the thought of Flush's misery, submitted to be blackmailed by the dog-stealing fraternity. Browning, in his rectitude, expressed horror: she was encouraging theft. "Would you not pay a ransom for *me*, if I were in the hands of brigands?" she asks. "Yes, in such an extreme case, I should," he replies, "but I should devote my life to the extermination of the scoundrels." "Well," she rejoins, "Flush is



[National Portrait Gallery.]

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING, 1859.

From a crayon drawing made in Rome by Field Talfourd.

my Elizabeth Barrett." At which point one may say that, while he was right in his original contention, she had the best of the argument. But no differences ever altered their love. *That* burned undimmed to the day when death opened for her the dread portal—nay, remained as a light to him till he too passed away, twenty-eight years afterwards.

And apart from correspondence and biography, the love of these two lovers lives in art. It lives in that superb series of "Sonnets from the Portuguese," which the wife placed in her husband's pocket one morning, early in 1847, as he stood and looked out of the window of Casa Guidi after breakfast,—telling him to read that and tear it up if he did not like it, and then hurrying out of the room. It lives in the admirable "One Word More, to E. B. B." of the husband's "Men and Women"; in the address to the "Lyric Love" of the "Ring and the Book"; in those fine manly lines ("Prospice") which tell how he himself faced death.

Meanwhile, to return to the prose of biographical detail, the fugitive couple were in Paris, after a fatiguing journey by boat and diligence; and there, much to Browning's relief, and infinitely to that literary lady's surprise, they came upon Mrs. Jameson, who kindly consented to accompany the young husband and his invalid wife on the way to Italy. "Delightful weather we had for the journey," the latter writes, "Mrs. Jameson says she won't call me improved but transformed rather." And so in the fresher air, the freer life,

to say nothing of Browning's companionship, Mrs. Browning gradually became comparatively a healthy woman. The winter was spent at Pisa. With the spring of 1847 they moved to Florence. All was new and interesting. The Italy of those days, it will be remembered, was not the more humdrum constitutional Italy of to-day. Unification had not taken place. The Pope still reigned at Rome. "Bomba," the bad Bourbon, misruled at Naples. Austria held Lombardy and Venice in its talons, and overshadowed the rest of the peninsula with vulture wings. Florence lived, and that uneasily, under the sway of a Grand Duke. In Piedmont alone did freedom's flag not "fly against the wind"; and throughout Europe the revolutions of 1848 were in the air. The Brownings lived at first almost entirely to themselves, only gradually mixing much in any society. They read, studied, worked, saw what there was to be seen—she under the guidance of a cicerone who was declared by Rossetti to possess a more encyclopaedic knowledge of art than Ruskin himself. Then the country was so cheap! And they were poor, and Browning had a most healthy abhorrence of debt and slipshod domestic finance. The climate, too, suited Mrs. Browning. Thus Italy was clearly the place for them; and in its enchantments the days, months, years, passed, not, of course, without chequer or cloud, but pleasantly, happily. On the 9th of March, 1849, a son came to gladden the union, receiving quite a glory of welcome and love. Then there were excursions to various parts of Italy. It was not

till the end of July, 1851, that the Brownings were again in England.

But the minutiae of the events of the years, extending till Mrs. Browning's death on the 28th June, 1861, must remain unchronicled. I cannot even dwell on the visit to Paris, begun in company with Carlyle—it was the poet, not the philosopher, who was the practical man of the party—a visit memorable for intercourse with various French notabilities, George Sand in chief—memorable also because it synchronized with one of the most fateful events in French history, the *Coup d'Etat* of December, 1851—and memorable to Browning personally because he then began a lifelong and close friendship with M. Joseph Milsand, a most able and sympathetic critic of English literature. Nor shall I dwell on a later visit to Rome in the spring of 1854, when quite a galaxy of genius and talent were assembled in the Eternal City: Thackeray and his two daughters—of whom one is not, while the other remains to us one of our most individual and graceful writers,—Lockhart, Fanny Kemble and Mrs. Sartoris, Gibson and Story the sculptors. Nor can I more than mention that in 1856 there was a substantial increase of means; for Kenyon, who had given £100 a year to the wedded poets during his life, bequeathed on his death £6,500 to Mrs. Browning and £4,500 to Browning. All these years were crowded with interest, and pleasure, and social intercourse of the best. Of work they were not prolific, if we judge by mere quantity. A slender volume, “Christmas Eve and

Easter Day," published in 1850, a short introductory essay (1852) to some letters of Shelley, which turned out to be forgeries, two not very large volumes of miscellaneous poems, "Men and Women," published in 1855—this cannot be regarded as a *large* "output" in the eighteen years extending from 1846, when the last number of "Bells and Pomegranates" was issued, to 1864, when "Dramatis Personae" appeared. But in art quantity counts for little, and quality for very much. "Christmas Eve and Easter Day" are strikingly original, and contain passages of fine humour and superb power; while in "Men and Women" Browning produced poems which he never surpassed, out-soaring here obscurity, mannerisms, all subtleties of thought and form,—the beauty standing clear and unclouded.

But the cloud was gathering on his life. Though with surroundings turned from darkness to light, Mrs. Browning's health had for a time undergone a wonderful change, yet she was essentially a delicate woman. There were recurring fits of illness. The politics of 1859-1860—all the vicissitudes of the Franco-Italian war against Austria, the struggles towards freedom in the Italian peninsula, the selfish Laodicean attitude of England, for so she held it—all this in her enfeebled state had tried and over-excited her. On the 29th of June, 1861, she died in her husband's arms at Florence, in the Casa Guidi that had so long been their home.

That was his last of Italy for some years. On the 1st of August he fled from Florence, and



19, WARWICK CRESCENT, PADDINGTON.

WHERE BROWNING RESIDED FOR TWENTY-FIVE YEARS
(1861-1887) AFTER THE DEATH OF HIS WIFE.

after spending some weeks with his father and sister near St. Malo, came to London, and finally took up his residence at No. 19, Warwick Crescent, in Paddington. The house which he occupied for over a quarter of a century, till 1887, is in itself a commonplace house enough, of the usual London type. But there is from the windows a pleasant view, with space for all our great city's beautiful light effects, over Paddington Canal, which at that particular point is islanded, and broadens out quite nobly. Here Browning established his household gods—the carved oak, the tapestry, the *bric-à-brac* from Casa Guidi. Here, too, he set himself to superintend his son's education—the idea of a public school having been discarded;—and here, finally, he settled down to the regular work which is at once grief's anodyne and tonic. There was to be no more dallying with the fitful Muse. Hitherto he had been coy with her, waiting to be wooed, only writing when she pressed her favours upon him. Now he became the wooer. She was to be assiduously courted for three hours in the morning of each day.

So the books succeeded each other with fair rapidity. In 1864 appeared "*Dramatis Personae*," similar in character and inspiration to "*Men and Women*"; in 1868-9 the four successive volumes of the massive "*Ring and the Book*"; in 1871 "*Balaustion's Adventure*," which includes the first of the Greek translations, and "*Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau*," suggested by the downfall of Louis Napoleon; in 1872

"Fifine at the Fair"; in 1873 "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country," which is, like "The Ring and the Book," a translation into verse of a *cause célèbre*; in 1875 "Aristophanes' Apology, including a transcript from Euripides, being the last adventure of Balaustion," and "The Inn Album," which we may call a novel in verse; in 1876 "Pacchiarotto, and how he worked in distemper," and other poems; in 1877 "The Agamemnon of Aeschylus," a translation; in 1878 "La Saisiaz," and "The Two Poets of Croisic"; and thereafter volumes of miscellaneous short poems: one series of "Dramatic Idyls" in 1879; another in 1880; "Jocoseria" in 1883; "Ferishtah's Fancies" in 1884; "Parleyings with Certain People of importance in their Day" in 1887; and, finally, "Asolando," which bears in its title a touching reference to the Asolo he had loved and sung in earlier days, appeared in 1889, as the old poet lay dying.

Here, quality apart, the quantity is unstinted. And Browning lived a busy social life. When he first came to London, after his wife's death, he had felt stricken, forlorn, out of harmony with the gaieties of human intercourse. But towards 1863, as he told Mr. Gosse, the utter loneliness of the evening hours, when his young son had gone to bed, preyed upon him. An effort was necessary, and he determined to accept all suitable invitations. Henceforward he was seen pretty well everywhere. As in old bachelor days, before his marriage, he mixed again freely with his kind. "I could not help noticing the chim-



THE VIEW FROM BROWNING'S WINDOW AT 19, WARWICK CRESCENT.

ney-board heaped with invitations; I never saw so many cards in my life before," says Mrs. Ritchie. Essentially the poet of man rather than of nature—for vividly as he saw and described nature, it was chiefly in its relation to man that nature interested him—he felt human society to be his proper field of study. Where people congregated there was he. He attended assiduously the private views at picture galleries. He listened to a great deal of music—I have often seen him in one of the front stalls at the Monday Popular Concerts. The figure was a familiar one in the London streets—the figure of a man of middle height, well-proportioned, active, alert, always scrupulously well-dressed and gloved—and the head strong and capable, but with nowhere a hint or suggestion of Bohemian eccentricity.

Meanwhile his popularity was slowly but surely reviving after the blight that followed the publication of "Sordello." The process was very gradual. My own memory goes back to the later fifties, when I came across a reference, in the "Athenæum" I think,—a comparison, if I remember right, between the storm in Tennyson's "Vivien" and the storm in "Pippa Passes":

Buried in woods we lay, you recollect;
Swift ran the searching tempest overhead;
And ever and anon some bright white shaft
Burned through the pine-tree roof, here burned and there,
As if God's messenger thro' the close wood screen
Plunged and replunged his weapon at a venture,
Feeling for guilty thee and me: then broke
The thunder like a whole sea overhead.

This seemed fine. There was, too, in a shop-

window in the Strand, a portrait of the poet—the portrait from Horne's "New Spirit of the Age." That had a certain look of inspiration, and aroused curiosity. Who was Browning? Nobody seemed to know much about him, except that he had married Mrs. Browning, with whose works one was fairly familiar, and had gone to live in Italy. So one bought the works, the dear old edition of 1849, in two volumes—in which neither "Sordello" nor "Strafford," still less "Pauline," had been republished—and the "Christmas Eve and Easter Day," and "Men and Women": and one became a Browningite, preaching Browning in season, and sometimes, it is to be feared, out of season. Doubtless this is a common experience. There grew gradually to be a cloud of witnesses. The poet's readers swelled in number as book followed book. Already in 1872 he was able to say:

Having hitherto done my utmost in the art to which my life is a devotion, I cannot engage to increase the effort; but I conceive that there may be helpful light, as well as reassuring warmth, in the attention and sympathy I gratefully acknowledge.

And with this growing popularity came honours which he received with an honest pleasure. In 1867 he was elected an Honorary Fellow of Balliol College; in 1871 a Life Governor of London University; in 1879 he was made an LL.D. of Cambridge; in 1882 a D.C.L. of Oxford; in 1884 an LL.D. of Edinburgh; and in 1886 appointed Foreign Correspondent of the

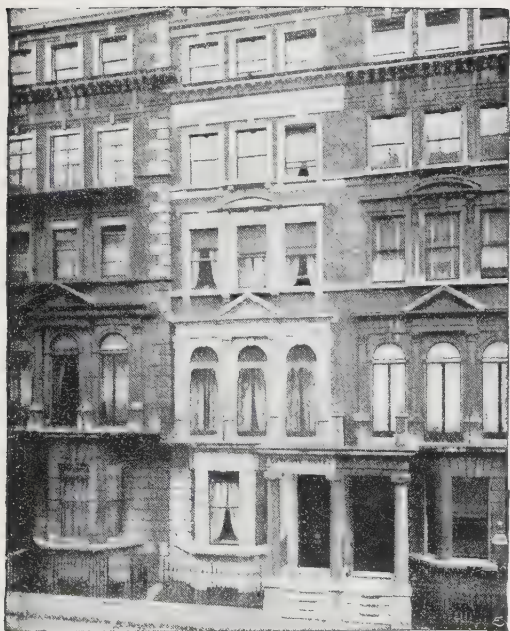
Royal Academy. So early as 1868 he had been asked to stand for the Lord Rectorship of the University of St. Andrews, in succession to Mill; but any posts involving public speech he invariably declined. As a talker he was ready, full of matter, anecdote, quotation, and very audible, with a voice which Mrs. Ritchie describes as a "loud dominant baritone." But he had no desire for oratorical display, and invariably shunned its opportunities.

As in the years before his marriage, so in the years of his later life, there is a comparative absence of outward memorable events. The most noteworthy incidents are annual excursions, to the South of France, to the coasts of Brittany and Normandy, to Scotland, to Switzerland, to Italy, which he visited again—for the first time in 1878—and to other places. At Pornic (1864 and 1865), Le Croisic (1866 and 1867), Saint-Aubin (1870, 1872 and 1873), all on the Atlantic-bathed shores of France, he picked up much material for verse—material worked up into such poems as "Gold Hair, a story of Pornic"; "Hervé Riel," which he sold to Messrs. Smith and Elder for one hundred guineas, for the benefit of the French wounded in the Franco-German war; "Fifine at the Fair"; the "Two Poets of Croisic"; and finally "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, or Turf and Towers," which is a "true story," sad enough, from Saint-Aubin;—while his stay near Geneva, in 1877, furnished him, very sadly, with material for "La Saisiaz."

Time dealt kindly with the old poet. His

natural force remained unabated almost to the very end. But, as he entered his seventy-eighth year, the shadow of death was creeping up to him. In the late summer of 1889, he left his house in De Vere Gardens, to which he had moved from Warwick Crescent in June, 1887, and proceeded with his sister to Italy. Asolo, the dear old Asolo of his youth, the Asolo of "Pippa Passes," was his first staying-place. Here, in what proved to be the evening twilight of his life, we get pleasant glimpses of him. He bathed in the beauty of the place, loved to linger gazing at the glorious prospect over the plain and far hills. If in the many drives and excursions to the places of interest in the neighbourhood the party was at all late, he would urge the driver to hasten, so as not to lose the sunset from his favourite view-point. He took his old keen pleasure in the loveliness of roadside, orchard, or running stream, and the associations of history or legend. He eagerly negotiated with the municipality for the purchase of a piece of land on which to erect a pleasant resort for his old age. "I was right," he said to Mrs. Bronson,¹ with whom he was staying at her house of La Mura—"I was right to fall in love with this place fifty years ago, was I not?" In the mornings he studied the Greek tragedians. In the afternoons there were drives. In the evenings he attended the local theatre when it was open; or else there was music and reading. Browning played on an old spinet—

¹ See her article in the "Century Magazine" for April 1900, vol. 59, p. 920.



29, DE VERE GARDENS, KENSINGTON.

BROWNING'S LAST HOME IN LONDON, TO WHICH HE REMOVED
FROM 19, WARWICK CRESCENT, IN JUNE, 1887.

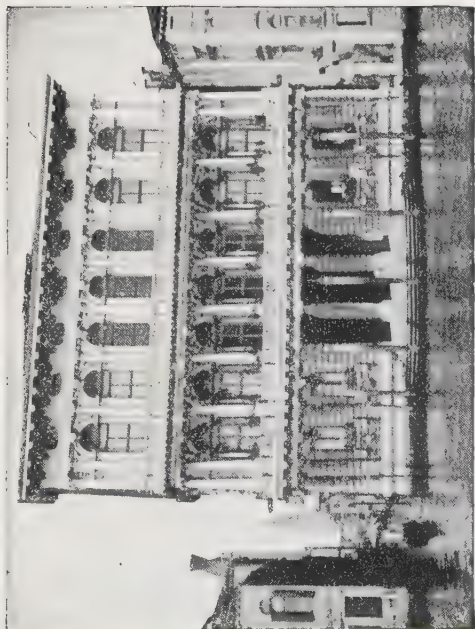
folk tunes and ancient music—and would read his own works, which he read with clearness and dramatic point, and rather, as I gather, for the meaning than the musing of them, not with a chant like Tennyson. Or else he would say, “No R. B. to-night, let us have some real poetry,” and take from the shelves a volume of Shelley, Keats, Coleridge or Tennyson. Nor did he regard his long life-work as at all over. Sometimes the thoughts of age, like those of youth, are “long long thoughts,” and he was projecting a tragedy, “better than anything I have done yet,” planning out his projected house at Asolo, and its grounds, looking forward to many years of labour. It is all gracious, brave, strenuous,—and pathetic for the end was near. By the beginning of November he had removed to his son’s stately residence, the Palazzo Rezzonico, at Venice. Towards the end of the month he returned from a foggy walk on the Lido with symptoms of a cold. Then came heart-failure. On the 12th of December, 1889, two hours before midnight, he passed away.

Writing to her lover on the 30th July, 1846, Elizabeth Barrett told him of a visit she had paid that day to Westminster Abbey: “Where Time itself seemed turned to stone.” Can she have foreseen at all, as she “stood where the poets are laid,” thinking it was “very fine . . . better than laureateships and pensions,” and read the epitaph on Spenser’s monument, telling, in words “earnest and beautiful,” of the “expectation of the second coming of Jesus Christ,”—can she have had any presentiment that the poet who

loved her so well, and whom she so loved, would one day be laid there among his peers? He was buried in Poets' Corner on the last day of the year 1889.

So ended the career of a man whose character was altogether fine and manly. His record is unimpeachable. He was a good son, a true lover and perfect husband, an excellent father, and in all social relations upright, honourable, blameless. With great gifts—those no one can deny him—he bore long years of neglect undiscouraged and unsoured, steadfastly refusing to court popularity. When success came it left him unspoiled. The healthy optimism which he preached in his verse bore its practical fruit in his life: here was no querulous arraigner of God and man. The faiths preached to his fellows were to himself a living faith. Perhaps I cannot sum all this up better than in the words of one who was a good judge of men:

It is impossible (writes Jowett) to speak without enthusiasm of Mr. Browning's open generous nature and his great ability and knowledge. I had no idea there was a perfectly sensible poet in the world, entirely free from vanity, jealousy, or any other littleness, and thinking no more of himself than any ordinary man. His great energy is very remarkable, and his determination to make the most of the remainder of life. Of personal objects he seems to have none, except the education of his son.



PALAZZO REZZONICO.

WHERE BROWNING DIED, DECEMBER 12, 1889.

THE POEMS

THE writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews contrasts two orders of priesthood: that according to Aaron, which accepts and carries forward an old tradition, and that according to Melchizedek, which begins from itself, "without father, without mother." A distinction of a similar kind exists among poets; and while, for instance, it is comparatively easy to trace Tennyson's affiliation to Keats and Coleridge, and, in a minor degree, Wordsworth, and through them to the great Elizabethans, so, on the other hand, it is difficult to find any ancestry for Browning. We have seen how as a youth he worshipped Shelley; but, even in "Pauline," published when he was twenty, though he speaks of Shelley with enthusiasm, yet, so far as poetical manner is concerned, the traces of Shelley's influence are of the faintest, the echo almost inaudible; and in none of the great mass of the later poems can I discover any alien influence at all. For good or ill he was his own "only begetter."

Nor can it, I think, be said that he has founded any poetic school. With preacher, teacher, essayist, his influence has, no doubt, been very great. But in verse, meaning verse that counts, I see

little trace of his manner or matter. Rossetti admired him greatly, and "Jenny" perhaps, has, some remote suggestion of Browning—but otherwise Rossetti is Rossetti. In the "Defence of Guinevere," William Morris's earliest and in my judgement finest book, some of the pieces give evidence that the author knew and loved the "Dramatic Lyrics," but, again, that does not come to very much. Altogether, as Browning had no ancestry, so has he had scant posterity. And on this the world may be congratulated. His manner and matter in imitation, and without the soul that gives them such strong life, would be but a doubtful boon to mankind.

In commenting on his works, it is not easy to adopt any very satisfactory order. The order which naturally suggests itself is the chronological; but this offers practical difficulties, because Browning himself reclassified some of the earlier poems, and the "works," as now published, naturally follow his classification, and not the order of original issue. I propose, therefore, in the following remarks, to proceed by group rather than date.

Now it is significant of the essentially dramatic character of Browning's mind that his first book, published when he was twenty, is written in the form of what may be called dramatic monologue. In "Pauline" it is the voice of Pauline's lover, not Browning's voice, to which Browning would have us listen; and so, throughout his works, he loved to place before us some man or woman of his creation, and he himself standing aside,

to allow that man or woman to narrate, explain, criticise, moralize, analyze, reveal. Let us take the dramatic monologues first.

And first in order naturally comes "Pauline, a Fragment of a Confession," published in 1833. This was not one of the early works which involved any expense to the kind father. An aunt, hearing that Robert had written a poem, advanced the necessary funds, and the little book came into the world in a sort of furtive manner—anonymously, dated from Richmond, where the author did not live—and with a note in French purporting to be written by the Pauline to whom the "confession" was addressed. That the book thus diffidently issued should fall almost still-born from the press, must have been a foregone conclusion. It contained no one element of popularity. Nothing was told of the hero's story, nothing even of the circumstances in which he unfolded the vague and shadowy record of his aspirations, errors, failures, and hopes. The confession seemed a confession in cloudland; and the general reader, in so far as he read here at all, must have been simply mystified. Browning himself soon came to regard the work as rather and only worthy to be forgotten. But one or two critics, to their credit be it spoken, saw more clearly. W. J. Fox, a Unitarian minister, and editor of the "Monthly Repository," to whom some of the poet's *juvenilia* had been submitted, saw, and said, that "Pauline," however immature, was immature in an original way, and a work of promise and genius. John Stuart Mill, there is

reason to believe, had also been struck by it—and projected a critical notice :—one would like to have that unwritten review !

“Paracelsus,” which followed “Pauline,” in 1835, is also in effect a monologue, for though written in the form of a drama, the other three characters, even Aprile, are almost negligible, and I have little doubt that, if written latter, Browning would have made Paracelsus the sole speaker. Here there is an immense advance on “Pauline,” the finished picture instead of the tentative sketch. True, the very conception of the poem—as it is clear from the foreword to the original edition that the poet knew at the time,—still put popularity out of the question. Though Paracelsus, unlike Pauline’s unnamed lover, was a real personage, and has a place in history and the records of science, and though Browning strictly observed historical and biographical truth, yet it was not at all on the incidents in Paracelsus’ life, and their influence on his character, that Browning dwelt. There *is* a setting of place and time—a dazzling “impression” of Constantinople picked out against the golden sky,

Like a Turk verse along a scimitar,

a quiet little sketch of a garden at Würtzburg,

A kingdom limited

Alone by one old populous green wall
 Tenanted by the ever-busy flies,
 Gay crickets, and shy lizards, and quick spiders,
 Each family of the silver-threaded moss.

But all this is quite subordinate. Paracelsus, though real enough in a sense, is almost an abstraction. He stands for a soul of intense arrogant ambition and boundless aspirations. It is the story of that soul that interests Browning—a story almost necessarily vague and shadowy—for what tangible results could come of all that stress and strain of intellect? However, though in no sense popular, "Paracelsus," when it first came out, made its mark with the fit and few. There were passages in it of noble thought fused into fine metaphor and appropriate speech; flashes of description vivid and startling; a genuine individuality in the use of blank verse; and two lyrics of great power and beauty. Fox again noticed the book adequately, and John Forster, Dickens's friend and afterwards biographer, coming upon it in the course of his reviewing, was moved to admiration, said right things in the "Examiner," and became Browning's life-long friend. The poem, to my mind, is too vague to be a masterpiece; but it is a very fine poem.

The next dramatic monologue filling a whole book is "Balaustion" (1871). Here there is no lack of outward circumstance. In the thirty-six years that had elapsed since the publication of "Paracelsus," Browning had thoroughly learnt the art of setting his characters in appropriate surroundings, and telling an effective story. Balaustion is a lyric Greek girl, full of all high and noble thought, a native of Rhodes, but a lover of Athens, and she tells how she has fled

from Rhodes because Rhodes has sided with Sparta. We see her and her companions in the "brave ship with the vermillion cheek," we see the "pirate bark" "panting up" in pursuit, the inspired girl springing to "the altar by the mast," and singing

That song of ours which saved at Salamis;

the oars answering to the song and "churning" the "black water white"; the parley outside the "sea-wide town with towers" off the Sicilian coast; and we seem to hear the promise hailed across the seas, of harbourage and safety, if she will recite to those outer Greeks, "Alcestis," the latest play of Euripides. The whole thing, including the translation of the drama, and Balaustion's comments thereon, is admirably done.

And admirable, too, if it were not so unduly weighted with subtle argument, would be "Aristophanes' Apology" (1875), in which Balaustion is again the speaker—an older Balaustion, saddened by the fall of Athens. She tells of her long colloquy with Aristophanes on the evening of the day of Euripides' death, follows the twistings and twinings of his sophistical apology for his attacks on the dead tragedian, and,—acknowledging his genius to the full,—points out to him a more excellent way. The book should be studied as history infused by imagination.

For "Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau" (1871), I care very much less. Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau is a monarch, still reigning, who fancies himself an exile, here in Leicester Square, un-

folding to a lady, "in pork-pie hat and crinoline," the mysteries of his saviourship of society; and under this disguise Browning wishes us to see the Emperor Napoleon III, who had just been deposed. Very clever, but obviously not history, and poetry almost as little. And, in a modified degree, that same charge of substituting an immense subtlety and cleverness for poetry, may be brought against "Fifine at the Fair" (1872). Fifine, or perhaps rather her prototype, was a real dancer, all "pink and impudence," who appeared before Browning at Pornic fair during one of his summer excursions, and set his fancy running through the lawless mazes of the poem; but she is not the speaker of the monologue. The speaker is Don Juan—a strange Don Juan whose curiosities are not so much of the senses and sensibilities, like the Don Juan of Molière or Byron, as of things irregular, and of persons, especially women, who stand outside the pale of respectability. His arguments are ingenious. They do not convince Elvire, his wife. But they have served to bewilder Browning's commentators; and I am not sure that the freakish humourist who lurked in Browning and played grotesque freaks in "Pacchiarotto," would be altogether displeased with this result.

So far we have been considering dramatic monologues that fill whole volumes. There are besides a superb host of minor poems, or relatively minor poems, in the same form. There is the Bishop ordering his tomb at St. Praxed's, in

whom, as Ruskin has said, was epitomized the very spirit of the Italian Renaissance, its paganism, superstition, and devotion to art and Latinity; there is David telling how he sang and exorcised the evil spirit from the Lord who troubled Saul; there is Karshish, the Arab physician, who narrates, as a physician would, how he has come across Lazarus, and the strange impression that the case has made upon him. St. John, too, dying in the desert, looks forward to the time when the actual witnesses of Christ's life shall long have departed, and meets the doubts of the future. Then there are painters—most admirable studies—Fra Lippo Lippi, and Andrea del Sarto, the man of faultless art with the soulless wife; to say nothing of the unnamed "Pictor Ignotus"; and musicians—Abt Vogler, who holds that he has built for eternity his soaring edifice of sounds, and the nameless organist who tries to unriddle the secret that lurks in the mazy fugues of Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha. Before us, too, passes Cleon, the cultured Greek, artist, poet, musician, philosopher, who with a life full and complete, faces death and the extinction of his faculties and knowledge, with horror.

Nor are there wanting personalities of a very different kind. Caliban, taking holiday in Prospero's island, and, as he thinks, safe-hidden, fashions for himself the caricature of a theology, with a god after his own image. Bishop Blougram, the worldly and accomplished Roman Catholic bishop, ecclesiastical politician rather

than priest, unfolds so much of his intellectual position as is necessary as a defence against the loose attacks of "Gigadibs, the literary man." Sludge, the American medium, in view of dollar notes and new chances across the broad Atlantic, confesses without shame—he is a very slimy rogue—the mysteries of his rascality.

All these, and more besides—the speakers in "A Grammarian's Funeral," "The Heretic's Tragedy," "Holy-Cross Day," "Up at a Villa—Down in the City," "Dîs aliter Visum," I have to omit—all these express themselves in dramatic monologue of a character more or less elaborate. There are others, many others, who express themselves in dramatic lyrics—shorter poems of varied metre and music, in which the imaginary person expresses some phase of passion or feeling. Here again Browning is often at his very best. His dramatic lyrics of love form a specially admirable collection. He has not, indeed, Burns's fresh directness, but he has to the full the "wayward modern mind dissecting passion." These love poems are superb for variety of range and power. I select from them as they occur in the seventeen volumes of the works: "In a Gondola," "The Last Ride together," "Porphyria's Lover," "Cristina," "The Lost Mistress," "Evelyn Hope," "Love among the Ruins," "A Lover's Quarrel," "My Star," "By the Fireside," "Any Wife to any Husband," "Two in the Campagna," "A Serenade at the Villa," "One Way of Love," "In Three Days," "Women and Roses," "James Lee's Wife," "The Worst of it," "Too Late," "Con-

fessions," "May and Death," "Youth and Art," "Numpholeptos," "St. Martin's Summer," "Mary Wollstonecraft and Fuseli," "A Pearl—a Girl." The catalogue, again incomplete, is dry—what catalogues are in themselves interesting?—but the poems catalogued, how beautiful they are! They form with the poems in which Browning spoke of his own love and its loss—if that can be regarded as lost which he held to be eternal—they form with these a most admirable collection of love lyrics.

Dramatic monologues, dramatic lyrics,—Browning also wrote dramas and dramatic scenes of the ordinary type, besides one poem in dramatic form, "Pippa Passes," which has a character and beauty all its own. His first play was "Strafford," written, as we have seen, in view of the footlights. Looked at apart from the stage, and as literature, it seems to me, I confess, to be one of the least satisfactory of his performances, and it is significant that he did not republish it in the collected edition of 1849. Not one of the characters stands out as living, from the king upwards—for he is a poor creature—while the blank verse is uninspired.

Again, in "King Victor and King Charles," the poetic element is weak, and the historical event itself without special interest, while of plot there is none. The reader feels that one of the characters, D'Ormea say, would have told the whole story better in monologue. With "The Return of the Druses," "A Blot in the 'Scutcheon," "Colombe's Birthday," and "Luria,"

we reach higher levels, though in "The Return of the Druses" there is some bewildering confusion of motive, and in the "Blot in the 'Scutcheon," some element of obvious improbability in the action, and, what is worse, some improbability of character; and I for one do not believe that Mildred Tresham and Mertoun would ever have found themselves in the position in which they stand to each other. And in "A Soul's Tragedy" and "In a Balcony," which, it is true, have less of the stage about them, we attain to higher levels still. Taking the plays altogether, it seems to me that Browning could create characters—Colombe, Luria, Gwendolen Tresham, Polyxena, Chiappino, Norbert, Constance, are excellently drawn, though Constance, perhaps, is over-subtle—but that he did not possess the dramatist's constructive faculty for placing them in juxtaposition, and making them work, through plot and episode, to a common result.

But among the plays, or quasi plays, there is one which, though evidently not adapted for the stage, stands out as specially original in conception, and beautiful in execution. "Pippa Passes" is written, as the French say, with Browning's very best ink. The subject suited him. Here was no necessity for the evolution of a plot, or for the evolution of character, under stress of circumstance, to a dramatic climax. The various scenes are distinct and separate. The link that binds them together is a link of pure imagination, and how beautifully forged! What a graceful figure that of Pippa, the silk-winder of Asolo, as she

goes singing through her one short holiday of the year, striking in with her songs on some central event in the lives of Ottima and Sebald, the guilty lovers; of Jules and his smirched but still redeemable bride; of Luigi, the hesitating patriot; of the Monsignor who, with his scoundrelly superintendent, is all but plotting her ruin. It is she, "God's puppet," who with the golden chain of her pure voice binds these people together in the feeling that the eye of God is upon them. She and her song make the unity of the piece. And how finely wrought each separate part—the finest for passion and poetry being the scene between Ottima and Sebald; and how beautiful the world, flooded with the molten gold of morning, on which the girl looks out at the beginning of her day. It is no wonder that Miss Barrett confided to her lover that of all his poems the one she would soonest have written was "Pippa Passes."

So far we have been considering the works, whether monologue, play, or lyric, in which Browning is writing dramatically; but naturally there are others in which he addresses the world in his own person. And here, I think, it is possible to trace the influence of his wife. Usually, as we have seen, each forbore to sway the other's art. But it is clear that, at least before they came to live together, she, the poet of a strong lyric personality, and of passionate convictions, was anxious that he should speak, *urbi et orbi*, with his own mouth, and not, as his genius had, so far, rather prompted him to do,

through the mouth of imaginary characters. Thus, in May, 1846, she writes :

Yet I am conscious of wishing you to take the other crown besides [*i.e.*, the crown other than dramatic], and after having made your own creations speak in clear human voices, to speak yourself out of that personality which God made, and with the voice which he tuned into such power and sweetness of speech. I do not think that with all that music in you, only your own personality should be dumb, nor having thought so much and deeply on life and its ends, you should not teach what you have learnt, in the directest and most impressive way, . . . it is not, I believe, by the dramatic medium that poets teach most impressively.

Browning evidently took this doctrine to heart, and it is significant that the first book published after his marriage, "Christmas Eve and Easter Day" (1850), is a book in which his religious convictions are expressed in a direct form. And henceforward, though he still wrote mainly either dramatically, or in what may be called dramatic narrative, and though the bent of his feeling was against self-revelation, yet he several times stood face to face with his audience, and at others with a disguise so thin that it might almost be away.

In "Christmas Eve" (1850), then, he regards Christ from the point of view of the chapel, of St. Peter's at Rome, and the German professor's lecture-room—the latter part suggested, no doubt, by Strauss' "Life of Jesus"—concluding, for his own part, that Christ "stands confessed as the

God of salvation." In "Easter Day" he discusses what was to him a very favourite proposition, returned to again and yet again, and most beautifully of all in "Cleon," viz., that this world is but a poor place without the complement of the world to come—a proposition afterwards more fully argued in "La Saisiaz" (1878). Of this latter work it is interesting to note the origin and occasion. During 1877 Browning's summer excursion took him to the chalet of La Saisiaz, near Geneva. His companions were his sister, who had come to live with him on his father's death, and Miss Egerton-Smith, an old and greatly valued friend. Suddenly, almost in his presence, without warning, and while apparently in good health, Miss Egerton-Smith fell down dead. Thus brought face to face with the problem of the soul's immortality, he set himself to reason it out anew, concluding for his own part—this is the burden of the book—that if there be no other world than this, we are without proof of the goodness of God.

In "Parleyings with certain People of Importance in their Day" (1887), which is another book in which Browning speaks in his own person, he discusses, with a great deal of subtlety, various problems of life, of moral worth, of poetry, of politics—there is a sort of fancy portrait, supposed to be of Lord Beaconsfield, in the parleying with George Bubb Doddington,—of art and the use of the nude, of music and the reasons why, in comparison with the other arts—for so he held—its forms are ephemeral. "Ferishtah's

Fancies" (1884), again, may be quoted as a book in which Browning appears in proper person, for though masquerading as a Persian Dervish, the "disguise," as he himself says, is "thin." Ferishtah, "going his rounds" in "Ispahan," or sitting "grieved beneath a palm tree," and indoctrinating his disciples by parable and apologue, is none other than Robert Browning instructing the British public on such questions as prayer, praise, punishment, the mystery of pain, the relative good and evil of life, the right of man to kill the animal for purposes of food, and the credibility of the Incarnation.

All matters worthy of thought most undeniably. But the very enumeration suggests a doubt whether they are matters that lend themselves to poetic treatment—whether, in fact, they ought to be treated in verse at all. The question how far a poet should be a thinker is a difficult one. I can scarcely adequately discuss it here. On the one hand it is incontestable that thought is the material with which language, whether prose or verse, must deal. On the other hand it is equally true that some of the most admirable poems—Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind," Keats' "Ode on a Grecian Urn," Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner"—are like tapestries of superb design and colour embroidered on no very substantial canvas of abstract thought. And this, at least, we may predicate, that if a poet is to treat the problems of destiny and life, he must, if poetry and not philosophy is to be the result, altogether transfuse those problems, give them life, warmth, colour,

music, and inform them with imagination and fancy. Thus, I would say of "Christmas Eve and Easter Day," where the transmutation has taken place, that they are mainly poetry, though there are some parts of disquisition which I would wish away, while in "Parleyings with certain People," and even "La Saisiaz," the prose predominates, and in "Fërishtah's Fancies" altogether prevails. Fërishtah, to do himself justice, should have written essays, or, still better, Socratic dialogues. As it is, I confess, with all respect for mine author, that his "Fancies" seem to me calculated to afford the same kind of pleasure as puzzle-solving rather than the kind of pleasure derivable from pure poetry.

And here it may be desirable to attempt a summary, however brief and inadequate, of Browning's main teaching. In the first place he was a theist. He had a strong conviction, which seems never to have wavered, that there existed a Being, omnipotent in power, by whom the universe had been created and was sustained. What were that Being's attributes? Power having been conceded, were we also entitled to believe that he was a God of love, and cared for the men and women he had made? Not so, answered Browning, if we are to judge only by the relative amount of good and evil meted out in this our world, for the evil predominates. Therefore, unless we are to conclude that the All-powerful is indifferent, or even malevolent, we must postulate another world or worlds, in which there will be redress for the evil that in this outbalances

the good. And if here it be objected that there seems no reason, to the human understanding, why the All-powerful should have chequered man's life, in the sum of it, and not given him the final good to begin with, then Browning replies that the sorrow and suffering and even the sin—all the manifold evils to which flesh is heir—are necessary to man's education, that they are essential to his development, and that if placed in a perfect world he would simply stagnate morally and intellectually, and so die with faculties atrophied and starved. Nor did Browning, as I read him, shrink from following out this line of thought to its legitimate conclusion. What he held as regards our condition of probation in this world, he held as regards our condition in the next. It was to be no place of rest, undisturbed and happy. As we have to battle here, so, under changed conditions no doubt, we should have to battle there.¹

A *working* hypothesis of life, in every sense, and a manly creed. But if the truth must be told, I rather deprecate regarding Browning as a prophet, seer, or teacher. Before all things he was a poet. Nor should it ever be forgotten in treating of his "message," that we are not dealing with reasoned treatises, like those of Mill or Herbert Spencer, but with a body of poems, mainly obscure in style and involved in thought, and sometimes, when we get beyond the central

¹ See specially the last three pieces of Browning's last book, "Asolando:" "Rephan," "Reverie," "Epilogue."

doctrine of theism, traversed by doubts and lines of contradictory speculation.

Having now spoken of the works which we have called dramatic, and of those which are didactic in that they embody Browning's teachings, expressed in his own person, we have next to consider a large body of narrative verse. "Sordello," "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country," "The Inn Album," "The Two Poets of Croisic," however much they may otherwise differ, are in effect stories. A story, too, is the "Ring and the Book," though told for the most part in dramatic monologues; but of the "Ring and the Book" I shall have to speak separately. Stories again are such poems, comparatively "minor," as the "Pied Piper," "The Flight of the Duchess," the "Dramatic Idyls."

In "Sordello" all is enigmatic. Sordello himself is a complex personage, a dreamer, of halt purpose and uncertain aims, part genius and part popularity-hunter—fortunately for himself, as one may say, dying in an hour of rectitude. His time is one of confusion, and altogether remote, for far indeed is the cry from the thirteenth to the twentieth century, and little indeed does the average modern know, or care, for the serpentine intrigues and bloody internecine warfare of Guelf and Ghibelline in the North Italy of the Middle Ages. Nor does the poet's treatment "make for lucidity." Someone had told someone else who told Browning that the style of "Paracelsus" was diffuse, and Browning, thus ill advised, crams and compresses his meaning beyond the verge of intelligibility, still

making confusion worse confounded by crowding parenthesis on parenthesis into sentences of interminable length. The reader is plunged into the whirlpool, to sink or swim as chance may serve. No help does the poet vouchsafe. To take one typical instance, Shelley is evoked as a "spirit" with a "pure face," but remains unnamed, and otherwise undefined. To identify Shelley on such a vague and allusive indication is like solving a double acrostic without the help of initial and final letters. And yet, and yet—O! the pity of it—the poem misses greatness by so little, and contains such quintessential poetry:

You can believe
 Sordello foremost in the regal class
 Nature has broadly severed from her mass
 Of men, and framed for pleasure, as she frames
 Some happy lands, that have luxurious names,
 For loose fertility; a footfall there
 Suffices to upturn in the warm air
 Half-germinating spices; mere decay
 Produces richer life; and day by day
 New pollen on the lily-petal grows,
 And still more labyrinthine buds the rose.

or again:

Dante, pacer of the shore
 Where glutton hell disgorgeth filthiest gloom,
 Unbitten by its whirling sulfur spume,
 * * * * *
 Plucker of amaranths grown beneath God's eye
 In gracious twilights where his chosen lie.

or yet again this description of Eglamor, the minor poet:

He, no genius rare,
 Transfiguring in fire or wave or air

At will, but a poor gnome that, cloistered up
 In some rock-chamber with his agate cup,
 His topaz rod, his seed-pearl, in these few
 And their arrangement finds enough to do
 For his best art.

But in "Sordello" Browning was learning his art as a story-teller, and, in that respect, there is the same leap between "Sordello" and "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country, or Turf and Towers" (1873) that there is between "Paracelsus" and "Balaustion." In "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country," the story narrated is a "true story," and, if the real truth must be told, of a somewhat squalid kind. The main incidents occurred in Normandy, where Browning spent his holiday in 1872, and they formed the matter of a big lawsuit in the French courts. Browning, as he had done in the "Ring and the Book"¹ (1868-1869), takes up the case, and versifies it with appropriate comments. Léonce Miranda, the protagonist, part Spanish and part French, all compact of sensibilities and superstition, is but a poor hero, who wallows in his sins, and then tries to expiate them by first burning off his hands and then breaking his neck; while his mistress and relatives act after their kind during his lifetime, and quarrel over the spoils when he is dead. How clever it all is, how searching the analysis of motive and action! No legal luminary could flash clearer light into the case. But, for the doubt will intrude itself, was it worth while for a great poet

¹ "The Ring and the Book," though practically *narration*, is dealt with separately.

to pick that ignoble story, unrelieved as it is by any dimmest pearl of good in the man himself, or the woman with whom he lives, or his sordid cousinry, or the ecclesiastical persons male and female who exploit his wealth and superstition—was it worth while to pick all this garbage out of the gutter of the law courts?

The "Inn Album" (1875), also is a story "founded on fact." It is a story of woman's betrayal, ending in the suicide of the woman and swift retributory death of her betrayer: tragedy tending to melodrama. And the telling is good, though the characters, cleverly as they talk, prose at times, perhaps, and analyze overmuch, as Browning's characters are too often tempted to do. Quite in a different vein is "The Two Poets of Croisic" (1878), especially the second part, which deals with the adventure of Paul Desforges Maillard, who, aided by "Cherry-cheeks," his sister, befooled, first, La Roque, editor of the "Mercure," and then that far bigger and more astute personage, Voltaire. Here we have comedy for melodrama. How Maillard wrote poems of indifferent quality, and how "Cherry-cheeks," giving them forth as hers, got La Roque and Voltaire to eulogize them, is told by Browning in his lightest manner and with much sprightliness of rhyme and humour. But, after all, though excellent at this kind of work, he was not supreme. Mr. Austin Dobson would possibly, I think, have told the story with even greater delicacy and finish.

Where he *was* supreme was in the shorter

stories of action, and mainly of swift action, stories not filling a whole volume. Indeed, of his gift as a pure story-teller, it is scarcely possible to speak too highly. When he would consent to abstain from wreathing his narrative in parasitic subtleties, no one could be more direct, rapid, forceful. "Hervé Riel," "How they brought the good news to Aix," "Childe Roland to the dark tower came," "The Pied Piper," "The Flight of the Duchess," "Pheidippides," "Ivàn Ivànovitch," "Echetlos," "Clive," "Muléykeh," "Martin Relph," and others,—all are admirably told. The scene, the surroundings, the atmosphere, are put in with powerful graphic touches. "Hervé Riel" has in it the salt of the sea; "How they brought the good news," the ring of the galloping horse-hoofs; "The Pied Piper," the swarming of mediæval burgher life; "The Flight of the Duchess," all the freedom of the "great wild country" in which the Duchess bursts her bonds; "Childe Roland," the brooding horror of an evil enchantment; "Pheidippides," "Echetlos," the glory of the fennel-field in which Marathon was fought; "Ivàn Ivànovitch," the limitless sense of snow-space in the Russian forestry,—and so throughout. But the surroundings never delay the action or dwarf the men. All these are fine poems.

Dramatic monologues, dramatic lyrics, poems in which the poet speaks or sings in his own behalf, poems long or short that unfold some story or describe some action—all this by no means exhausts the catalogue of Browning's works. There is also, to begin with, a certain body of

translation from the Greek: the "Alcestis" of Euripides, embodied with comments in "Balaustion," the "Herakles" of Euripides in "Aristophanes' Apology," and the "Agamemnon" of Aeschylus. The two first are fine; the "Agamemnon," in my view at least, altogether a mistake. It is very well for Browning to speak, in his prefatory note, of "allowable constructions" of language that "happen to be out of daily favour," and of rendering "the very turn of each phrase into as Greek a fashion as English will bear." But to transpose Greek into uncouth, unmusical, and scarcely intelligible English, neither is, nor can be artistic translation, or calculated to afford literary pleasure. Then, besides the translations, there are a considerable quantity of miscellaneous works, more than I can attempt to enumerate, and still less even summarily describe. And many are so beautiful! "Old Pictures in Florence," "The Guardian Angel," "A Toccata of Galuppi," "Pan and Luna," "The Statue and the Bust," what a superb collection!

STYLE AND ARTISTRY

“SIMPLE, sensuous, passionate,” these, according to Milton’s often-quoted saying, are the terms that essentially characterize true poetry. Let us see how far they characterize the poetry of Browning.

Not “simple” very certainly. No one can say of the great mass of Browning’s work that it is simple. Complexity of language and thought, obscurity, subtlety, these have from the beginning been the charges brought against it, the main drags on its recognition. A poet whose writings stand in need of Primers, Handbooks, a Cyclopaedia, several explanatory volumes, and, in certain cases, analyses and partial translations into prose—to say nothing of the elucidatory labours of a society—such a poet may have all the gifts, but simplicity is not one of them. He who runs *cannot* read Browning.

Was this obscurity deliberate? Here he himself does not speak with a quite certain voice. Writing in 1872,¹ his tone is rather that of injured innocence: “Nor do I apprehend,” he says, “any more charges of being wilfully obscure, un-

¹ Introduction to volume of “Selections.”

conscientiously careless, or perversely harsh." But, writing to Miss Barrett in 1845, he had made this admission: "I used rather to go about for a subject of offence to people, writing ugly things in order to warn the uncongenial and timorous off my grounds at once." The truth I take to be that with all his power of dramatic creation, he had great difficulty in placing himself in the sort of external position which a reader occupies. Mainly he did not know when he was, and when he was not intelligible, and therefore mainly he did not trouble to control to definite and clear issues his knowledge, which was curious and multiform, his fertility of illustration, which was immense, and his subtlety of analysis and thought, which was astounding.

Does Browning's art suffer from this lack of simplicity? The question is perhaps more debatable than it seems. Poetry is not altogether an art in which every outline must be definite and clean-cut. There is room for glory and haze as well as hard pure light, for suggestion to the imagination and fancy as well as appeal to the reason. And some, no doubt, are stimulated in their study of Browning by the very difficulty and the uncertainties of the result. All this may be granted. Even so however I cannot but hold that his poetry did suffer from obscurity in the language and over-refinement of dialectics. Let us hear what Miss Barrett says:

As for Browning, the fault [of "sphinxiness"] is certainly great and the disadvantage scarcely calculable it is so great. He cuts his language into

bits, and one has to join them together, as young children do their dissected maps, in order to make any meaning at all, and to study hard before one can do it. Not that I grudge the study or the time. The depth and power of the significance (when it is apprehended) glorify the puzzle.

This is just, and it is not without significance that two of Browning's works, published during his wife's lifetime, or shortly after her death, "Men and Women" and "Dramatis Personæ," are of all most free from obscurity, most simple, most direct: and I should like to add, in justification of Milton's saying, that in them is reached and held the summit of his art. Here in poem on poem there is no need of an interpreter to stand between poet and reader. The appeal is art's direct appeal.

Thereafter the cloud gathered too often. True he was seldom again as verbally obscure as in "Sordello"; but he too frequently suffered his wonderful subtle cleverness to crowd out the pure poetry; and though no one else could have written the parts of "The Ring and the Book" to which this criticism applies, or "Prince Hohenstiel-Schwangau," "Red Cotton Night-Cap Country," "Aristophanes' Apology," "The Inn Album," "Pacchiarotto," "La Saisiaz," "Ferishtah's Fancies," or the "Parleyings"—compact as they are of learning, cleverness, insight, humour—yet it is not, as I think, on these works that his fame will ultimately rest. Such parts of gold as are in them will scarcely prevail with Time, the great sifter.

Simplicity not being one of Browning's assets,

can we place sensuousness to his credit? Ah, most certainly! It is not merely that he sees, hears, feels, with the utmost acuteness, and has the power of translating into verse his sensations of woman's beauty, of the light that lives in the sky and on the earth, of the splendour of the colour of things, of the magic of art, of the music of man or bird, but—and this I take to be what Milton had in view—his language itself is sensuous in that it appeals habitually to the senses. It is made up of terms that we can, as it were, see, hear, taste, handle. The illustration by concrete things is habitual. Metaphor and simile crowd one another. This is true not only when he is at his best, but even when he is indulging in speculation and argumentative disquisition, and most nearly on the fringe of prose—even then he ever and anon soars into poetry on the wings of some illustrative image. In this concreteness of thought and speech he is a true poet.

And if Browning's verse be sensuous, so most certainly is it passionate. Hot human blood courses, as one may say, through its veins. Whether he be speaking in his own person, or through the mouth of one of his innumerable characters, the language is always that of life. He plays with a strong hand over the whole scale of human feeling. Even when he is simply narrating or describing, he does so with the fervour of a distinct personality.

"Sensuous," "passionate," but not "simple," this we can say of his verse. What of the forms

in which it is cast? Browning's command of metre is very great. His blank verse possesses much variety, has a force and music all its own. Where he wishes it to go, it goes and goes well, ambling, curvetting, caracolling, stately marching, galloping, or soaring; and, when there is that call upon it, singing as it goes. Of other metres he has at command an almost illimitable number. Rhymed ten-syllable verse ("Sordello"), eight-syllable verse ("Easter Day"), Alexandrines ("Fifine at the Fair"), fifteen-syllable verse ("La Saisiaz"), verse measuring by accent not syllables ("The Flight of the Duchess" and "Christmas Eve"), eight-stanza verse built on three rhymes ("The Two Poets of Croisic")—all these he uses with excellent effect in his longer poems;—and in his shorter poems the changes are quite infinite, and again and again most full of the appropriate music.

That in his blank verse he attains the grand organ roll of Milton, or the sustained sweetness and beauty of Tennyson, I am not prepared to say; nor that for beauty of verbal music, beauty alone, his lyrics will stand comparison with the best lyrics of Tennyson, Shelley or Keats. But then pure beauty, beauty for its own sake, was scarcely what Browning had in view. He sought for force, significance, human interest. Let us take for comparison Tennyson's "Ænone" and "Tithonus" on the one side, and Browning's "Artemis" and "Cleon" on the other. All four derive from classical antiquity. In "Ænone" and "Tithonus" the music of the verse is unsur-

passable, the pictures offered, as one may say, to the eye, of great beauty, the pathos of the speakers' words most real. But there is nothing specially Greek about the poems, nor do they touch on more than what may be termed general matters of feeling. In "Artemis" and "Cleon," the verse, though still most beautiful, has not that same witchery of music, but "Artemis" is a study of Greek thought, an infusion of life, after the Greek manner, into a Greek goddess; and "Cleon" is Greek again, with that yearning in it for the hereafter, that twilight of the Christian hope, which brings the Greek so near to us across the ages. Tennyson: "honour the great name!" But let Browning not be without honour also.

For he has that to give us which none else can give with equal power. In vivid description he is not surpassed, nor in variety of interest; nor, again, in what I have called the dramatic faculty. When he intended to produce a man or woman who should not be a mere shadow of himself, like Ferishtah or Pacchiarotto, he did it most admirably. His power went far beyond critical insight. He possessed the true magician's wand, and could evoke at will the real dead, or creatures of his own fancy, and give them life. Among the moderns his gallery of living characters is unsurpassed. And the circumstance and verisimilitude with which they are placed before us is marvellous. He owned in a superb degree what the French call the art of *mise en scène*, the art of literary staging. Nothing can well be finer

than the scene in which Balaustion first appears. Or take again the scene of St. John's death in the desert:

This did not happen in the outer cave,
Nor in the secret chamber of the rock,
Where, sixty days since the decree was out
We had him, bedded on a camel-skin,
And waited for his dying all the while;
But in the midmost grotto: since noon's light
Reached there a little, and we would not lose
The last of what might happen on his face.

The whole scene, apart from the apostle's own speech, is quite wonderful as giving the impression of "what might have been." So David, penetrating into the "black mid-tent's silence," where for "a space of three days," "Saul and the Spirit" have been at strife:

Then once more I prayed,
And opened the foldskirts and entered, and was not afraid,
But spoke, "Here is David thy servant!" and no voice
replied.
At the first I saw naught but the blackness; but soon I
descried
A something more black than the blackness--the vast, the
upright
Main prop which sustains the pavilion: and slow into
sight
Grew a figure against it, gigantic and blackest of all.
Then a sunbeam, that burst thro' the tent-roof--showed
Saul.

This spilth of light on the main figure is like one of Rembrandt's irradiations. But if I endeavoured to make anything like a complete enumeration of the cases in which Browning

shows this particular kind of power, I should never have done. He shows it not only in such poems as the "Englishman in Italy," where the description of life and scenery, rather than the speaker's character, is the main object. He shows it throughout his work. The fair in which *Fifine* figures is as alive as *Don Juan*. Caliban's cave is before us; we see the lightning flash that puts his theology to rout. Fra Lippo Lippi justifies his conceptions of life in the very Florence of the Medicis. Everywhere the man or woman of Browning's creation is placed in surroundings that are striking and strikingly appropriate. Not only, to use again the stage image, is the scenery beautiful; it possesses historical and geographical verisimilitude. With finest artistry every detail of each scene is so fashioned that the actor seems to move and speak in the world assigned to him by the poet.

Ay, and to *think* there! That is the higher achievement, and leads one at once, instinctively, to discard all image drawn from the stage. Browning's men—they are no actors—think as men thought in their day and country, not as men think in ours. Aristophanes discusses many problems that are problems still, and his speeches make us feel, as Browning doubtless intended that we should, that Athens and London are not without analogies; but in listening to the Greek we are not harassed by an evil suspicion that we are duped into listening to an Englishman of to-day. So, as we have seen, Cleon is a Greek, and Artemis, if one may use the paradox, a Greek

goddess. The speaker in "Imperante Augusto natus est" is a Roman. Karshish is not a masquerading physician out of Harley Street. Fra Lippo Lippi, Andrea del Sarto, are painters of the Italian Renaissance. The Bishop at Saint Praxed is the half-pagan ecclesiastic of his age. Filippo Baldinucci laments over the degeneracy of the times—in which one "must not pelt the Jews"—with all the fervour of a Florentine of the year 1676. The speakers in "The Ring and the Book," each in his degree, speak the speech and think the thoughts of the papal Rome of the seventeenth century. This power of reproducing mental atmosphere—the "historic sense" carried to this point of acuteness and delicacy—is very rare. I know of no other poet who possesses it in an equal degree, no poet whose imagination plays so naturally and freely in an age or country other than his own. From the historic point of view Tennyson is a child beside Browning.

To repeat, Browning did not put beauty first. He asked the Muse for other gifts. But she was not so churlish as to refuse him that boon in addition to those on which he had set his heart. She gave him enough of beauty to give grace and glory to what is best of his work, and, as I think, for all time.

For all time—that is, perhaps, rather begging the question, so often asked, whether his poetry will live? "Live," let us define our terms. What do we mean when we say of a poet's work that

it "lives"? Take a case. Milton's verse has assuredly not passed out of remembrance. No one would say that

All of him is dead
Save what in heaven's store-house is uplaid.

But how many persons, apart from the necessities of an examination, have read "Paradise Lost" during the last twelve months? Not many, I fear. And yet "Paradise Lost" is Milton's most important work, one of the masterpieces of universal literature. It seems to follow that a poet may "live" though his works are not very often perused. We must look for our definition elsewhere. And the right definition I take it to be, speaking generally, that a poet may be said to live when his verse comes with such a reputation from the past, such inherent force and beauty, that it challenges the attention of each succeeding generation, and compels acknowledgement. Thus most men at all interested in poetry have felt that Milton's was a power not to be ignored, and have read "Paradise Lost" at least once in their lives, making for themselves, most likely, a selection of passages to be conned and re-conned. This is the sense in which a poet "lives" for generations other than his own. And in that sense Browning will, I think, hold a place in English literature. It is quite unlikely that the problems which he discussed, and which interested his own generation, will equally interest the world half a century, or a century hence. Much that he wrote will probably have perished

except to the student of thought. But the essential poetry of him, the best, the quintessence, the many poems and passages in which he fused passion and thought and beauty and music into verse—*that* will not be without readers.

“THE RING AND THE BOOK”

MOONING about Florence one “memorable” June day in 1860, among the *bric-à-brac* exposed for sale in the piazza of San Lorenzo, Browning came upon a “square old yellow book,”

Small quarto size, part print part manuscript,
bearing a Latin title which he thus translates:

A Roman murder case:
Position of the entire criminal cause
Of Guido Franceschini, nobleman,
With certain Four, the cutthroats in his pay,
Tried, all five, and found guilty and put to death
By heading or hanging as befitted ranks,
At Rome on February Twenty Two,
Since our salvation Sixteen Ninety Eight.

Any *cause célèbre* had a fascination for Browning. It attracted him, I take it, as a fault in the earth's surface, telling of upheaval and elemental force, attracts the geologist. He at once bought the book for “eight pence English just,” had mastered the contents,

from written title-page
To written index,

by the time he reached the door of Casa Guidi;

and, after eight years of labour, educed therefrom "The Ring and the Book."

What was the story of crime that cast such a spell on the poet? Let Browning epitomize:

Count Guido Franceschini the Aretine,
 Descended of an ancient house, though poor,
 A beak-nosed bushy-bearded black-haired lord,
 Lean, pallid, low of stature yet robust,
 Fifty years old,—having four years ago
 Married Pompilia Comparini, young,
 Good, beautiful, at Rome, where she was born,
 And brought her to Arezzo, where they lived
 Unhappy lives, whatever curse the cause,—
 This husband, taking four accomplices,
 Followed this wife to Rome, where she was fled
 From their Arezzo to find peace again,
 In convoy, eight months earlier, of a priest,
 Aretine also, of still nobler birth,
 Giuseppe Caponsacchi,—caught her there
 Quiet in a villa on a Christmas night,
 With only Pietro and Violante by,
 Both her putative parents; killed the three,
 Aged, they, seventy each, and she, seventeen,
 And, two weeks since, the mother of his babe
 First-born and heir to what the style was worth
 O' the Guido who determined, dared and did
 This deed just as he purposed point by point.
 Then bent upon escape, but hotly pressed,
 And captured with his co-mates that same night,
 He, brought to trial, stood on this defence—
 Injury to his honour caused the act;
 And since his wife was false, (as manifest
 By flight from home in such companionship,)
 Death—punishment deserved of the false wife
 And faithless parents who abetted her
 I' the flight aforesaid—wronged nor God nor man.
 "Nor false she, nor yet faithless they," replied
 The accuser; "cloaked and masked this murder glooms;
 True was Pompilia, loyal too the pair;

Out of the man's own heart this monster curled
Which crime coiled with connivancy at crime—
His victim's breast, he tells you, hatched and reared;
Uncoil we and stretch stark the worm of hell!—
A month the trial swayed this way and that
Ere judgment settled down on Guido's guilt;
Then was the Pope, that good Twelfth Innocent,
Appealed to: who well weighed what went before,
Affirmed the guilt and gave the guilty doom.

Such, stated briefly—no one could “pack closer” than Browning when he liked—are the main facts which he amplified into a poem occupying, as originally published in 1868-9, four volumes. Let us see how this is done.

In Section I Browning himself is the speaker. He explains in detail how he came across the records of the trial, what was the course of procedure, what steps he himself had taken to get at the bottom of the case, what were the essential facts, as stated above, and generally propounds his subject. And he concludes with an impassioned invocation to the lost, the “lyric Love”:

Never may I commence my song, my due
To God who best taught song by gift of thee,
Except with bent head and beseeching hand—
That still, despite the distance and the dark,
What was, again may be; some interchange
Of grace, some splendour once thy very thought,
Some benediction anciently thy smile:
—Never conclude, but raising hand and head
Thither where eyes, that cannot reach, yet yearn
For all hope, all sustainment, all reward,
Their utmost up and on,—so blessing back
In those thy realms of help, that heaven thy home,

Some whiteness which, I judge, thy face makes proud,
Some wanness where, I think, thy foot may fall.

In Section II we have a speaker who represents "Half Rome." This speaker is not without personal bias. He has a wife, addressed "of eves with lute and song," by a certain "jackanapes," the cousin of his interlocutor, and he takes occasion to explain to that interlocutor what evils befall where wives go wrong. He throughout sides with Guido, the much-wronged husband befooled by the young wife and too handsome priest. Their tale of the deliverance of one in sore extremity, and an innocent flight, this "Half Rome" laughs at.

The "Other Half Rome" (Sec. III) takes exactly the opposite view. He sides with the

¹ I am indebted to the Rev. Blomfield Jackson for a *gloss* by Browning on this extract. Mr. Jackson had written to Browning for an explanation, and Browning, most courteously, replied in a letter from which the following is an extract: "Such a paraphrase as you want would, I suppose, be the following: 'May I never conclude a song but,—in return for what has been conceded to bent head and beseeching hand,—to wit some interchange, etc.,—but by raising hand and head to heaven, so to conclude in gratefully blessing back—or returning a blessing for—whatever manifestation in that heaven shall have sent to earthly eye a token of real presence—whether some whiteness, the brighter for the starry clusters, which etc. etc., or even, in the lowest degree, some wanness, merest suspicion of light where etc. etc.—the force of 'I judge' and 'I think' being proportioned to the assurance in the one case, and the doubt in the other. May I add that the indisposition to write this 'plainly' even now, may account for the original failure,"—*i.e.*, the possible "real fault of obscurity."

pitiful child-wife, not seventeen years old, who lies a-dying:

Little Pompilia, with the patient brow
And lamentable smile on those poor lips,
And, under the white hospital array,
A flower-like body.

She lies, with over-plus of life besides
To speak and right herself from first to last,
Right the friend also, lamb-pure, lion-brave,
Care for the boy's concerns, to save the son
From the sire, her two-weeks' infant orphaned thus,
And—with best smile of all reserved for him—
Pardon that sire and husband from the heart.

So does one "half Rome" side with the wife, as the other sided with the husband, each restating the facts from one or the other point of view.

Tertium quid (Sec. IV) is a very superior person, and sides with neither. He is, we may take it, an ecclesiastic on promotion, *abate* or Monsignor, and judicially details pros and cons to "an Excellency" and a "Highness," whom he has button-holed at some great assembly. Both are "idiots," as he confides to us in an aside, and he leaves them as puzzle-headed as he found them.

In the Fifth Section we leave as it were the outskirts, and go to the centre. So far we have been listening to hearsay evidence and second-hand opinion. A superior person has spoken after his kind. A partisan of Guido has set forth the case against the wife. A partisan of Pompilia has put the points in her favour. Browning him-

self has illustrated and commented. Now we listen to one of the three main actors. It is Guido who speaks.

Ah, the wolf with a fox's cunning! How he twists and doubles. He tells of his long years of devotion to the Church, waiting for preferment—of his marriage, in which, while his wife gave youth, beauty, and a dowry, he gave rank: it was a bargain, and she refused to do her part with a wife's submission and love. In every way he has been tricked. When he quarrelled with her parents, they sprang upon him the shame that she was not their daughter, but a child of infamy purchased by Violante. Of course he sets aside the hideous accusations made against his household. Of course he asserts that Caponsacchi has constantly been prowling round Pompilia. Naturally he relies on their flight together as a damning proof of guilt. Why, it might be asked, had he waited so long to carry out his vengeance? Because the birth of a son had overfilled the measure of his wrongs. Even then, however, he declares that the final act of murder was not fully premeditated—that if after he knocked at the villa door, and it was opened at the name of Caponsacchi—even then he would have spared if the door had been opened by Pompilia, or old Pietro; but at the hated sight of Violante his passion had burst all bounds.—Clever, clever, Count Guido, and not without eloquence. But ah! the lies, and the snarl of the wolf's teeth; and was it not the birth of a son—Pietro, Violante and Pompilia being

put out of the way—that would enable you to claim their possessions?

In Section VI the next of the main actors appears, Caponsacchi. He with an indignant eloquence, in words vibrating to gusts of high and noble passion, repeats the story of his relations with Pompilia. He had told it before, and only been half believed. Now murder gives it emphasis. From accused he becomes accuser. He tells how a shameful woman from Guido's household has tried again and again to entrap him into an intrigue with Pompilia, and how, having once seen Pompilia's face, he utterly refused to believe that any of the pretended letters or messages came from her. He recalls how they met,—and she told him of her utter need, how she was threatened in soul and body—how she had appealed in vain to archbishop and governor—and how another life was now linked with her own, a life that she must try to save. Would he take her to her parents in Rome? Compliance was so inevitable that he scarce stops to explain it. Then he relates the incidents of their flight; the hoarded words—beautiful words they are—which she had spoken during the long rumble of two nights and days; her swooning from utter prostration at Castelnovo, a dozen miles from Rome, as the third night closes in; his pacing of the outer passages while she rests in the guardianship of the innkeeper's women-folk; the irruption next morning of Guido, armed with the power of the law; the breaking into the room where she lies asleep, when,

She started up, stood erect, face to face
With the husband: back he fell;

and seeing how her deliverer is pinioned among
the rabble, her righteous anger boils over:

“Ha!—and him

Also you outrage? Him too, my sole friend,
Guardian and saviour? That I baulk you of,
Since—see how God can help at last and worst!”
She sprang at the sword that hung beside him (Guido),
seized,
Drew, brandished it, the sunrise burned for joy
O’ the blade, “Die,” cried she, “devil, in God’s name!”
Ah, but they all closed round her, twelve to one.

Thenceforward they had been in the hands of
the law—their story half-believed—she relegated
to the convent of the Convertites, he, as having
placed himself in a questionable position, sent
into not dishonourable exile;—and the result of
the law’s guardianship is that she, the saint, lies
butchered. Ah! “the pity of it,” as he unfolds
the “what might have been,”—she not a wife, he
not a priest,—and then breaks in on his own
dream of a possible calm in the long years after
she is dead:

“O great just good God! Miserable me!”

Caponsacchi having unfolded his lamentable
tale, Pompilia next (Section VII) unfolds a tale
even yet more lamentable in its restraint and
resignation. Poor child, who has had such
terrible burdens to bear in her seventeen short
years of life, who has had womanhood forced
upon her in such awful form! Her marriage
was a piece of trickery. She had been cheated

into it when scarce thirteen,—Pietro her father being also deceived—as a lamb is inveigled into the shambles. Her life with Guido, whose brother made shameful love to her, whose mistress tried to enmesh her in foul intrigue, whose own cruelties were incessant, and diabolical,—was hell. She had settled down, in her despair, to bear all, till one morning when she became conscious she was to be a mother. For her child she determined to be free. She tells the mistress, who, in collusion with Guido, had been trying to commit her with Caponsacchi, that she will speak to Caponsacchi—whose character she had partially gauged when looking on his face at the theatre. She says to Caponsacchi from her window:

“ You serve God specially as priests are bound,
And care about me, stranger as I am,
So far as wish my good,—that miracle
I take to intimate He wills you serve
By saving me,—what else can He direct?
Here is the service. Since a long while now
I am in course of being put to death :
While death concerned nothing but me, I bowed
The head and bade, in heart, my husband strike.
Now I imperil something more, it seems,
Something that ’s trulier me than this myself,
Something I trust in God and you to save.
You go to Rome, they tell me: take me there,
Put me back with my people ! ”

She speaks of their flight; justifies her onslaught on her husband:

“ for a worm must turn
If it would have its wrong observed by God ; ”

has kindly words of extenuation for Violante, forgives her husband, even acknowledges that she owes him somewhat:

“I am saved through him
So as by fire; to him—thanks and farewell!”

croons over the thought of her baby:

“Born all in love, with nought to spoil the bliss
A whole long fortnight: in a life like mine
A fortnight filled with bliss is long and much!”

and peers into his future, as mothers will. And finally a love, quite pure, of soul for soul, a love that is not of this world, flames out white and saintly. She, dying, stands on the same level as Caponsacchi, who has yet to live, and sends him these words for message:

“Do not the dead wear flowers when dressed for God?
Say, —I am all in flowers from head to foot!
Say,—not one flower of all he said and did,
Might seem to flit unnoticed, fade unknown,
But dropped a seed, has grown a balsam-tree
Whereof the blossoming perfumes the place
At this supreme of moments!

* * * * *

So, let him wait God's instant men call years;
Meantime hold hard by truth and his great soul,
Do out thy duty! Through such souls alone
God stooping shows sufficient of His light
For us i' the dark to rise by. And I rise.”

With Section VIII we descend to an altogether lower level. Dominus Hyacinthus de Angelis, the *Pauperum Procurator*, appointed, in virtue of his office, to defend Guido, is of the earth earthy:

A jolly learned man of middle age,
Cheek and jowl all in laps with fat and law,
Mirthful as mighty.

Here we are admitted

to behold

The manner of the making out a case,
First fashion of a speech, the chick in egg,
The masterpiece law's bosom incubates.

He sits in his study excogitating his harangue,
garnishing it with legal jargon in legal Latin,
and sorely tempted aside every moment by
thoughts of a birthday feast for "old curly-pate,"
his son, aged eight years—the son much doted
on, the feast much gloated over.

A kindred figure is that of Juris Doctor Jo-
hannes-Baptista Bottinus, the "Fisc" (Section
IX), whose office it is to prove Guido guilty,
and thus incidentally to defend the fame of
Pompilia. He is

A man of ready smile and facile tear,
Improvised hopes, despairs at nod and beck,
And language—ah, the gift of eloquence!

And

the outside man,

Blue juvenile pure eye and pippin cheek,
And brow all prematurely soiled and seamed
With sudden age, bright devastated hair.

In his mouth, as may be surmised, the case does
not want for eloquent periods and pomp of ora-
tory. The man is as vain as a peacock.

All this law business—assuming it was worth
while to do it at all—is done with a most ad-
mirable cleverness. The legal points are taken

up with great acuteness and skill; the difference in kind between a lawyer's case and the essential truth suggested very subtly. Much, humour, though not perhaps of a very delicate kind, is exhibited in the portrait of De Angelis composing his oration; and humour, with an added touch of satire, in what is afterwards recorded of Bottinus, who, having established Pompilia's purity and innocence, intends, greatly to his own satisfaction, to show that she had forfeited her property by her misconduct, and that the Convertites, and not her son, were her rightful heirs. Ah! what an opportunity for forensic ingenuity!

Next comes the awful decision of the Pope (Section X), an old man, eighty-six years of age, who knows that he himself is on the threshold of God's judgement hall. He,

sitting out the dim
Droop of a sombre February day
In the plain closet where he does such work,

weighs the whole case, apports approval and disapproval to major and minor actors alike, praises duly Pompilia, "perfect in whiteness," and his "warrior-priest," and "irregular noble scapegrace," Caponsacchi,—censures, in their degree, Guido's hideous brotherhood, his mother, the Archbishop and Governor of Arezzo who have refused to listen to Pompilia's appeals, Violante, the nuns of the Convertite Monastery who are putting in their ugly claim for Pompilia's goods, the four accomplices in the murder,

who had arranged to murder Guido himself because he delayed to pay the wages of their crime, and lastly Guido, the hellish protagonist in the tragedy.

"For the main criminal I have no hope
Except in such a suddenness of fate.
I stood at Naples once, a night so dark
I could have scarce conjectured there was earth
Anywhere, sky or sea or world at all :
But the night's black was burst through by a blaze—
Thunder struck blow on blow, earth groaned and bore
Through her whole length of mountain visible :
There lay the city thick and plain with spires,
And like a ghost disshrouded white the sea.
So may the truth be flashed out by one blow,
And Guido see, one instant, and be saved.
Else I avert my face, nor follow him,

* * * * *

Enough, for I may die this very night,
And how should I dare die, this man let live?
Carry this forthwith to the Governor !"

It is all solemn and austere, with music as of an organ and bells of death and the trumpet of judgement.

Section XI takes us back to Guido in his cell, knowing he must die. There is a poem, a singularly beautiful poem, by Alfred de Vigny, entitled "Le Loup," in which the poet offers to man, as an example, a wolf, transpierced, and consenting to death with stoic fortitude. Guido, who again and again acknowledges his wolfhood, is no such wolf as this. He whines, and snarls, and whimpers, and gnashes his teeth, and tries to tear and bite, and when he hears the "accursed psalm" of those who are come to hale

him to the block, shrieks out to the woman he has tortured and hacked to death :

“Pompilia, will you let them murder me?”

And so, with Section XII, “The Book and the Ring,” we round the circle, and come back to Browning again—his comments, his philosophy, the additional facts he has collected, the final hope that his ring of verse might serve as a guard to the “rare gold ring” with which his “Lyric Love” had linked England and Italy.

It is on record that when Carlyle first met Browning after the publication of “The Ring and the Book,” he uttered this characteristic compliment: “It is a wonderful book, one of the most wonderful poems ever written. I re-read it all through—all made out of an Old Bailey story that might have been told in ten lines, and only wants forgetting.” “Ten lines” and “only wants forgetting,”—these be hard sayings. No doubt it was a marvellous *tour de force* to educe a poem of over twenty thousand lines—just about twice the length of “Paradise Lost”—out of materials that at first sight seem scanty. But what is still more amazing is the immense variety of interest which Browning has, almost throughout, succeeded in maintaining. His plan, as will have been seen, involved the statement, or approximate statement, of the same incidents over and over again: from different points of view, no doubt, and with some selection according to the points of view, but still the same incidents. Yet such

is the individuality of the speakers, so varied their mode of statement and of argument, so infinite are the poet's resources—illustration, metaphor, simile, quip, crank, point of humour, dialectics, learning,—so widely does the verse range from modes of highest poetry and passion to modes of trivial domestic comedy, that throughout this long poem of twenty thousand lines there is no sense of idle repetition or monotony. Does this mean that it is not too long? That I am not prepared to say. "One half Rome," "the other half Rome," "Tertium Quid," the two legal gladiators, are made to speak with an immense cleverness. No one but Browning could have given a life so intense to what comes from their lips. But, after all, they are on the fringe of the subject, not of its centre. We scarcely need such elaborate proof that different people take different views of the same circumstances. And then life is short, and art may be too long. In brief, to use the language of the river, I do not think these speakers "pull their weight." The boat would travel better without them on its way to posterity. Nay, if the full truth must be confessed, I think it would travel all the lighter if the Pope and Guido had *trained* with a little more rigour.

But as to the "only wants forgetting" of Carlyle, that might be true of the "Old Bailey story" taken alone and in itself. But how far from true of the story as fashioned by Browning's genius! Make what deductions you like: eliminate all that is merely clever, subtle, acute, ingenious, and there remains beyond, in the speeches of

Pompilia, Caponsacchi, the Pope, Guido, in the comments of the poet himself, a body of pure and elevated poetry, dealing in language of noble beauty and appropriate music, with the heights and depths of human nature. From these fine uplands of verse the light will never, I venture to think, wholly fade.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

A FULL bibliography of Browning's Works, and the books and articles relating to them, would be very extensive. That of Mr. J. P. Anderson, attached to Mr. William Sharp's "Life of Browning," in the "Great Writers" series, published nearly fifteen years ago, occupied twenty-two crowded pages, and since that date the Browning literature has increased enormously. The following is a list of Browning's own works in the order of publication:

Pauline	1833
Paracelsus	1835
Strafford	1837
Sordello	1840
Pippa Passes (<i>Bells and Pomegranates</i> , No. I)	1841
King Victor and King Charles (<i>Bells and Pomegranates</i> No. II)	1842
Dramatic Lyrics (<i>Bells and Pomegranates</i> , No. III)	1842
Cavalier Times.	
I. Marching Along.	
II. Give a Rouse.	

III. My Wife Gertrude.	
Italy and France.	
I. Italy.	
II. France.	
Camp and Cloister.	
I. Camp (French).	
II. Cloister (Spanish).	
In a Gondola.	
Artemis Prologuizes.	
Waring.	
Queen Worship.	
I. Rudel and the Lady of Tripoli.	
II. Cristina.	
Madhouse Cells.	
I. Johannes Agricola.	
II. Porphyria.	
Through the Metidja.	
The Pied Piper of Hamelin.	
The Return of the Druses (<i>Bells and</i>	

- Pomegranates*, No. IV) 1843
 A Blot in the 'Scutcheon (*Bells and Pomegranates*, No. V) 1843
 Colombe's Birthday (*Bells and Pomegranates*, No. VI) 1844
 Dramatic Romances and Lyrics (*Bells and Pomegranates*, No. VII) . . . 1845
 How they brought the Good News.
 Pictor Ignotus.
 Italy in England.
 England in Italy.
 The Lost Leader.
 The Lost Mistress.
 Home Thoughts from Abroad.
 The Tomb at St. Praxed's.
 Garden Fancies.
 I. The Flower's Name.
 II. Sibrandus Schafnaburgensis.
 France and Spain.
 I. The Laboratory.
 II. The Confessional.
 The Flight of the Duchess.
 Earth's Immortalities.
 Song.
 The Boy and the Angel.
 Night and Morning.
 Claret and Tokay.
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 Time's Revenges.
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 Men and Women . 1855

Vol. I

- Love among the Ruins.
 A Lover's Quarrel.
 Evelyn Hope.
 Up at a Villa—Down in the City.
 A Woman's Last Word.
 Fra Lippo Lippi.
 A Toccata of Galuppi's.
 By the Fireside.
 Any Wife to any Husband.
 An Epistle of Karshish.
 Mesmerism.
 A Serenade at the Villa.
 My Star.
 Instans Tyrannus.
 A Pretty Woman.
 "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower came."
 Respectability.
 A Light Woman.
 The Statue and the Bust.
 Love in a Life.
 Life in a Love.
 How it strikes a Contemporary.
 The Last Ride Together.
 The Patriot.
 Master Hugues of Saxe-Gotha.
 Bishop Blougram's Apology.
 Memorabilia.

Vol. II

- Andrea del Sarto.
 Before.
 After.
 In Three Days.
 In a Year.
 Old Pictures in Florence.
 In a Balcony.
 Saul.
 "De Gustibus——"
 Women and Roses.
 Protus.
 Holy-Cross Day.

The Guardian-Angel.
 Cleon.
 The Twins.
 Popularity.
 The Heretic's Tragedy.
 Two in the Campagna.
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 Abt Vogler.
 Rabbi Ben Ezra.
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 A Likeness.
 Mr. Sludge.
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The Ring and the
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Prologue.
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 St. Martin's Summer.
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 Cornhill Magazine,
 March 1871.)
 A Forgiveness.
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The Agamemnon of
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La Saisiaz . . . } 1878

The Two Poets of } 1878

Croisic . . . }

Dramatic Idyls . 1879-80

Series I

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 Ivàn Ivànovitch.
 Tray.
 Ned Bratts.

Series II

Proem.
 Echelos.
 Clive,
 Muléykeh.
 Pietro of Abano.
 Doctor —
 Pan and Luna.
 Epilogue.

Jocoseria 1883

Wanting is—What?
 Donald.
 Solomon and Balkis.
 Cristina and Monaldeschi.
 Mary Wollstonecraft and
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 Adam, Lilith, and Eve.

Ixion. Jochanan Hakkadosh. Never the Time and the Place. Pambo. Ferishtah's Fancies . 1884 Prologue. Ferishtah's Fancies. 1. The Eagle. 2. Melon-Seller. 3. Shah Abbas. 4. The Family. 5. The Sun. 6. Mihrab Shah. 7. A Camel-Driver. 8. Two Camels. 9. Cherries. 10. Plot-Culture. 11. A Pillar at Sebzevah. 12. A Bean-stripe; also Apple-eating. Epilogue. Parleyings with Cer- tain People . . 1887 Apollo and the Fates—a Prologue. I. With Bernard de Mandeville. II. With Daniel Bartoli. III. With Christopher Smart. IV. With George Bubb Dodington. V. With Francis Furini.	VI. With Gerard de Lair- esse. VII. With Charles Avison. Fust and his Friends—an Epilogue. Asolando . . . 1890 Prologue. Rosny. Dubiety. Now. Humility. Poetics. Summum Bonum. A Pearl, a Girl. Speculative. White Witchcraft. Bad Dreams. Inapprehensiveness. Which? The Cardinal and the Dog. The Pope and the Net. The Bean-Feast. Muckle-mouth Meg. Arcades Ambo. The Lady and the Painter. Ponte dell' Angelo, Venice. Beatrice Signorini. Flute-music, with an Ac- companiment. "Imperante Augusto natus est——" Development. Rephan. Reverie. Epilogue.
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The complete poetical works are published in three editions:

1. In 17 volumes.
2. In 8 ,,
3. In 2 ,,

The volumes in editions 1 and 2 can apparently be obtained separately, as also, apparently, "Parleyings with Certain People of Importance," "Ferishtah's Fancies," "Jocoseria," "Dramatic Idyls," 1st series, "Prince Hohen-

stiel-Schwangau," and "Asolando." The earlier works have been republished in many forms.

Browning's one publication of any importance in prose—for the "short introduction" to the sermons of the Rev. Thomas Jones has little importance—has been lately republished under the following title :

"Browning's Essay on Shelley, being his introduction to the spurious Shelley letters. Edited with an introduction by Richard Garnett, C.B., LL.D." London, 1903.

Very many selections from the works have been published. The first, issued in 1863, was made by John Forster and B. W. Procter (Barry Cornwall), and was, at its date, excellent. Since then selections have multiplied, especially selections from the earlier poems, which have passed out of copyright. The following may be mentioned :

"Selection from the Poetical Works of Robert Browning." First Series and Second Series, 1872 and 1880. (These are Browning's own selection.)

"Pocket Volume of Selections from the Poetical Works of Robert Browning," 1890.

"Selections from Browning," edited by Frederick Ryland. (Bell's English Classics.) 1898.

"Selections from the Early Poems of Robert Browning, with notes and an introduction by W. Hall Griffin." 1902.

"Poems by Robert Browning, with introduction by Richard Garnett, LL.D., and illustrations by Byam Shaw." 1897.

The books dealing with Browning's works, in elucidation or criticism, are very numerous. On doubtful points the following may be consulted:

"A Handbook to the Works of Robert Browning," by Mrs. Sutherland Orr. With Bibliography. (Ninth edition, 1904.)

"The Browning Cyclopaedia, a guide to the study of the works of Robert Browning, with copious explanatory notes and references on all difficult passages." By Edward Berdoe, 1892. (Some of the explanations are, no doubt, fanciful, but much must be forgiven to the enthusiast.)

There are also Browning "Primers," of which that by F. Mary Wilson, "A Primer on Browning," 1891, is known to me. "An Introduction to the Study of Browning," by Arthur Symonds (1886), is also a more advanced primer, if such a term be admissible. Some of the papers in the following may be consulted with advantage: "Browning Studies, being select papers by Members of the Browning Society. Edited, with an introduction, by Edward Berdoe." Second edition. 1899.

In general elucidatory criticism, "The Poetry of Robert Browning," by Mr. Stopford Brooke (1902), is helpful and of great interest.

The following biographies are known to me:

"Life," by William Sharp ("Great Writers" series). 1890.

"Life and Letters," by Mrs. Sutherland Orr (1891).

"Life," by G. K. Chesterton ("English Men of Letters" series). 1903.

"Life," by Edward Dowden ("The Temple Biographies"). 1904.

Mr. Sharp's book, published almost immediately after Browning's death, may yet be consulted with advantage. Mrs. Orr's "Life" was written with access to much original material, and is still the fullest and most authoritative, but it suffers, like Mr. Sharp's "Life," from a too early publication, many reminiscences, letters, etc., having since come to light. Mr. Chesterton is vivacious and paradoxical, and may be read with great interest and profit by those who are in a position to control their author. Those who are only just embarking on a study of Browning will find a more sober, and perhaps useful guide in Professor Dowden.

The following books of correspondence are of capital importance in studying Browning's biography:

"The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning," edited with biographical additions by Frederick G. Kenyon. 2 vols. 1897.

"The Letters of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, 1845-1846." In 2 vols. Second impression. London. 1899.

The first notice I can find in print of the little story about Douglas Jerrold and "Sordello," given at pp. 20, 21, is contained in "The Living Authors of England," by Thomas Powell, New York, 1849. The story is there told as "an

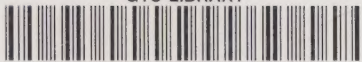
anecdote" which Powell had "heard," and told much as I tell it.

In conclusion, I should like to thank Dr. Garnett for much kindly help given in connection with this little volume.

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